

Minutes of the Audit and Standards Committee Meeting held on 12 December 2017

Present: Martyn Tittley (Chairman)

Derek Davis, OBE
Mike Davies
Michael Greatorex
Syed Hussain
Ian Lawson

Carolyn Trowbridge (Vice-Chairman)
Ross Ward
Bernard Williams
Jill Hood
Paul Northcott

Apologies: David Brookes, Jeremy Oates and Victoria Wilson

PART ONE

90. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

91. Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 September 2017

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 September be approved and signed by the Chairman.

92. Annual Audit Letter for Year Ended 31 March 2017

Mr Jason Burgess from Ernst & Young informed the Committee that the external auditors were required to issue an annual audit letter to Staffordshire County Council following completion of their audit procedures for the year ended 31 March 2017. The letter was shared with Members. No questions were asked.

RESOLVED: The report was received.

93. Annual Report on Health, Safety and Wellbeing Performance 2016/17

Mrs Rebecca Lee introduced her report drawing Members' attention to some of the highlights in the report, progress against key action points for 2016/17 and identifying key priorities for 2017/18. The report detailed the key successes of the service; gave details of Service Level Agreements with schools and described what the Council was doing to improve the health of the workforce. The Council has agreed a range of key performance indicators, details of these were given in Appendix 1 to the report. She went on to describe the health and safety evaluation process; accident and incident data; costs of accidents and incidents; internal health and safety investigations; incidents during 2016/17; Health and Safety Executive's involvement; details of joint consultation; the work of the Occupational Health Unit and details of liability claims. New legislation and key topics for 2017/18 were described and key actions.

In summary she stated that it had been a successful year for the health, safety and wellbeing service, although there remains room for improvement. The number of accidents, incidents and reportable incidents had declined and the risk management audit reported a 100 per cent return. There was also a good level of return for the Management Standards survey, although the response from schools could be improved. Planned audits were completed.

To add to the points made in her report, she stated that Personal Resilience Training had been in high demand and extra courses had been added to the training programme.

Members asked for the reason behind the 588 incidents toward employees and were told that the number related mainly to incidents in units with children with challenging behaviour and was not due to aggression towards staff by the public.

There had been a 29 per cent increase in the staff absence due to psychological disorders. Members asked details of the reasons behind this increase and were informed that the increase was spread across the organisation, but with more cases in Families First where staff were on the frontline. The significant increase had followed a period when the figure had been in decline. Mental health and wellbeing was being discussed in the organisation and her Service was now looking at what else they could do to raise awareness and encourage staff to get help at an early stage so that they could get well and return to work. One Member asked for caution in the use of terminology, specifically the use of the term 'psychological disorder'.

In regard to Fire Inspections, Members asked in the light of the Grenfell Tower fire, if anything significant had been found. Members were assured that the main findings were around fire doors showing signs of wear and tear and this had been reported for action to Strategic Property. There are few buildings in Staffordshire clad with ACM material and these are low level buildings.

Members asked if the Council benchmarks itself against other authorities. Mrs Lee stated she met with colleagues in the West Midlands regularly but the difficulty she had was that all Councils used different reporting systems. She assured Members that Staffordshire was well below smaller authorities. However, Staffordshire was to introduce a new recording system and she anticipated that there would be an increase in accident and incident reports as the system will be easier to use. However, we will capture a wider range of data including near misses, road traffic accidents and environmental incidents and it will be easier for staff to oversee KPIs.

Members asked how effective the 'flu vaccination programme for staff was. Mrs Lee responded that its effectiveness could not be proven, but it was right for the Council to offer 'flu vaccination to staff working with vulnerable people.

Members asked if line managers would benefit from receiving wellbeing training at the same time. Mrs Lee responded that there was training that Managers should receive separately as it relates to their management responsibilities. However, the wellbeing programme was open to all staff.

A Member stated that an issue had been raised with him in his role as a school governor regarding whether vaccines were suitable for different faiths and cultures e.g. people

who were Hindu or Muslim. The role of the Council is to encourage take up amongst its workforce (not children), but the offer of the vaccine is voluntary. The Council support the national campaign.

Members asked what was happening to recover the debt associated with the successful removal of material in the ducts, completion of the site clean-up activities and air testing levels returning to below the World Health Organisation levels at Flash Ley Primary School. John Tradewell, Director of Strategy, Governance and Change replied stating that every effort was being made to recover the financial impact, but the matter was complicated by the number of parties involved. The Council were taking Counsel's advice on the matter.

Members went on to discuss what mental health and wellbeing support was offered to them. They also asked Mrs Lee if she could clarify their role in the case of a terrorist attack. The Health and Safety site on the intranet gives access to four CALM modules that can be accessed by Members. It was agreed to put together an update on mental health and wellbeing to share with Members in early 2018.

Members went on to ask if an update on local resilience could be given. There is also information, newsletters and a video on Run, Tell and Hide on the Health, Safety and Wellbeing website.

The Head of Law and Democracy stated that personal resilience training had been offered to Members as part of Induction training, tailored to meet the needs of Members. This could be offered again if required. Emergency planning and how Members will be supported will be the focus of the Members' Spring Event. Another member said that the training on emergency planning and civil contingencies had not focussed on how they should respond in the case of a major incident.

Mr Tradewell reassured Members that the Council has well-rehearsed arrangements in place with a variety of tried and tested scenarios. For many years central government had discouraged identification of terrorism on the risk register. The top risk identified on the Council's risk register is how we would respond in the case of a 'flu pandemic. In the case of a terrorist attack, the County Council is the second line of defence, becoming involved in the recovery phase. District/Borough Councils deal with major incidents in the area, and initially lead on them. It is only if the incident is very significant or lengthy that the County Council gets involved in the leading those incidents, and even then we take the lead in the recovery phase. The initial response is from the emergency services. The last major incident that the County Council was involved with was foot and mouth disease.

Member involvement in the resilience Plan is identified in the recovery phase, but is different for each local authority. Philip Atkins would lead on public communications in the recovery phase.

The Council has Directors on Call over the week-ends and dealing with emergency situations is ongoing. The arrangements to deal with major incidents are well-tested by officers and it should be effective in the event of a terrorist type incident.

Members asked if they could be updated on local resilience (Run, Tell, Hide) as part of the Members' Spring Event.

A Member raised an issue regarding an incident at Cheslyn Hay High School that Mrs Lee agreed to follow up outside the meeting.

Mrs Lee was thanked for her comprehensive report and its focus on prevention and it would be interesting to see next year what difference this had made.

RESOLVED: The report be noted and an update to be provided to Members on mental health and wellbeing support available to them.

94. Internal Audit External Quality Assessment

Lisa Andrews, Interim Head of Audit and Financial Services gave an overview of the internal audit external quality assessment and asked Members to note the terms of reference for the audit review scheduled to take place from 22 January 2018 for one week.

The report outlined the approach that the assessment will follow. Standard 1300 outlines the requirements for a Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP) for the Internal Audit Service and details the key aspects.

In addition, Standard 1310 sets out the requirements for the QAIP to include both internal and external assessments. Following a Joint Procurement exercise with local government colleagues, Ray Gard, from CIPFA has been appointed as external quality assessor. The review will be undertaken through a process of interviews with key stakeholders, including Members of the Audit and Standards Committee, the main external clients and a document review.

The review will include a review of the number of documents that are considered fundamental to the exercise and these are listed in paragraph 8 of the report. The assessor would like to make a visit to the Audit and Standards Committee but unfortunately there was not a meeting scheduled at the point of this visit and may therefore send out a questionnaire to Members. A meeting will be scheduled with the Chairman of the Committee.

A final report will be produced and shared with the Committee in March 2018. There were no questions asked.

RESOLVED: The report was noted.

95. Internal Audit Plan 2017/18 - Annual Update

Lisa Andrews, Interim Head of Audit and Financial Services updated Members on the progress against the 2017/18 Internal Audit Plan and the amendments to the original Plan, including those audits that had been cancelled since its approval in June 2017, in Appendix 1 of the report. Members were asked to note that there had been a number of changes to the Plan as a result of the introduction of the new Financial and Payroll systems.

Members were asked to note the progress with the implementation of high level recommendations made during 2017/18 – Appendix 2 of the report. The response rate from Customer Satisfaction Surveys had continued to rise this year. Work has concluded to re-procure the Staffordshire External Support Contract. The Council will also use the NHS support contract in addition when procuring external support to deliver the annual plan.

With reference to the table on p50 of the report, there were no limited assurance opinion reports to report to Members since their last meeting. Details of external clients were given and the in-house team continues to deliver the Internal Audit function including the management of the existing in-house team for South Staffordshire Council.

Appendix 2 of the report detailed a number of high level recommendations that had not been implemented by the agreed date. Managers were actively pursued until a response was received. Following previous involvement of the Committee, arrangements were more robust.

No questions were asked.

RESOLVED: The report was noted.

96. National Fraud Initiative (NFI) 2016/17 - Update

Lisa Andrews, Interim Head of Audit and Financial Services outlined the progress made to date on investigating the data matches received from the Cabinet Office In January and May 2017 as part of the 2016 National Fraud Initiative. The report outlined the data sets submitted by the Council and Appendix 1 to the report gave the amount recovered to date according to different match types. The Council was pursuing the recovering of a further £85,766. Any learning from this activity will be shared to prevent further problems going forward. Further details will be given in the Internal Audit Annual Outturn Report which is scheduled to be presented to the June 2018 meeting.

No questions were asked.

RESOLVED: The report was noted.

97. Audit and Standards Committee Forward Plan

Members were asked to consider the Forward Plan.

RESOLVED: Subject to an interim External Audit Plan being added to the March agenda and some minor amendments to clarify the wording, the Plan was approved.

98. Exclusion of the Public

The public were excluded by virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

99. Exempt Minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2017

RESOLVED: The Chairman drew Members' attention to the response that he had received from the Leader of the Council regarding Cyber Essentials.

That the exempt minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2017 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

RESOLVED: The exempt Minutes be approved and signed by the Chairman.

Chairman

Documents referred to in these minutes as Schedules are not appended, but will be attached to the signed copy of the Minutes of the meeting. Copies, or specific information contained in them, may be available on request.