

Governance, Audit, Risk Management and Standards Committee

Minutes

24 January 2023

Present:

Chair: Councillor Kanti Rabadia

Councillors: Ghazanfar Ali
Philip Benjamin
Kuha Kumaran
Varsha Parmar
Yogesh Teli
Antonio Weiss

45. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance.

46. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that no declarations of interest were declared by Members.

47. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2022, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

48. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received.

49. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions had been received.

50. Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no deputation had been received.

Resolved Items

51. References from Council and other Committees/Panels - Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2022/23

At the request of Cabinet in December, the Committee reviewed the Council's Treasury Management Mid -Year Report 2022/ 2023.

The report was introduced by the Head of Strategic & Technical Finance. The report set out the actual performance as of 30 September 2022. Particular attention was drawn by the Head of Strategic & Technical Finance to the fact that the Council has been keeping within its borrowing limits, which was the main prudential indicator on the Treasury Management report. As a result of the increased interest rates from the Bank of England, it was reported that the Council can expect an improved position in investments by the time of year end.

The Chair of the Committee requested that Members were provided with a separate training session to provide further clarification regarding MRP. It was also agreed that future reports would reference the General Fund in full rather than its abbreviation of GF.

Members of the Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions about the report and these were responded to accordingly.

RESOLVED: That the Treasury Management Mid-Year Review for 2022/23 be noted.

52. Governance Update - Complaints

The Committee received a report from the Director of Legal and Governance Services which provided a Governance Update regarding complaints.

An Officer introduced the report stating that it was the first report to the Committee pulling together themes surrounding complaints. The report was set out in four parts.

The first part of the report set out the code of conduct for Members. The Officer highlighted that the new code was issued in 2020 and updated in May 2021. Members were informed that a report will be brought to the Committee at a future meeting asking if they want to update the code to reflect the changes.

The Officer noted that Waste and Recycling followed by Concessionary travel had received the highest number of corporate complaints. The Committee were informed that the complaints policy was to be reviewed in 2023 to improve the customer experience. The Officer highlighted to the Committee

that when comparing the number of complaints received in comparison to other London Boroughs, the statistics portrayed Harrow in a favourable light.

In response to questions from Members it was clarified that:

- Members do not sit on a panel to hear complaints. Corporate complaints were dealt with by a specific team and Member complaints were dealt with by the Monitoring Officer.
- Waste and Recycling received a high volume of complaints to do with missed bins. The Officer confirmed this could be high due to people raising a corporate complaint about a missed bin rather than using the missed bin portal. The corporate complaints team have been looking to direct people to the missed bin portal.

A Member raised a number of questions surrounding the Council's Whistleblowing Policy and sought confirmation that the reason why Harrow had fewer complaints in comparison to other London Boroughs had nothing to do with the potential sanctions employees could be faced with if a complaint was raised. The Officer confirmed that the Member would receive a written response to these questions.

The Chair sought indication as to the process that was being followed to ensure that specific complaints would not occur in the future. The Officer confirmed that subsequent updates to the Committee would feedback into this.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

53. Update from Auditors - Verbal Update

The Committee received a verbal update from the Director of Finance on behalf of the external auditors for the 2021-22 Statement of Accounts. The Director of Finance informed Members that this audit has not yet been completed due to three outstanding areas. The Committee was informed that the auditors are due back on site on 13 March 2023.

A Member of the Committee expressed their disappointment that the audit had not yet been completed and no advance notice of reasoning for this had been provided. The Member stated that they would have preferred if the external auditors had attended the Committee to explain this. It was agreed that the external auditors would come along to the next GARMS Committee to provide Members with some form of update even if the audit was not completed.

Members of the Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions and were informed that:

- The statutory deadline for the 2021-2022 accounts was 30 November.
- The auditors requested a lot more information than in comparison to previous years regarding valuations.

- The external auditors had not been in since November and it was suggested that this could have been due to an allocation of resources.

The Chair of the Committee requested a separate briefing with the new partner to update on progress. A Member requested that the auditors provide a written response clarifying the reasons for delay.

RESOLVED: That the verbal update be noted.

54. Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED: That in accordance with Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) for the reasons set out below:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Reason</u>
11.	Information Report – Q3 Corporate Risk Register 2022/23	Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
12.	Information Report – Internal Audit Red Assurance Report Follow Up	Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

55. Information Report - Q3 Corporate Risk Register 2022/23

The Committee received a confidential report of the Director of Finance and Assurance, which set out the Council’s Corporate Risk Register 2022/23 for Quarter 3 of the financial year to assist the Committee in monitoring progress on risk management in accordance with its terms of reference.

The report was introduced by the Head of Internal Audit and Corporate Anti-Fraud. Members of the Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions and these were responded to accordingly.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

56. information report - Internal Audit Red Assurance Report Follow-up

The Committee received a confidential report of the Director of Finance and Assurance, which acted as a follow-up to a red assurance report undertaken by Internal Audit as part of the 2021/22 Internal Audit Plan and reported as of the Significant Governance Gap in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 Annual Governance Statements.

The report was presented to help fulfil the Committee's purpose to provide assurance to the members of the adequacy of the Council's governance, risk management and control framework.

The report was presented by the Head of Internal Audit & Corporate Anti-Fraud.

Members of the Committee were given the opportunity to asked questions about the report and these were responded to accordingly.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(Signed) Councillor Kanti Rabadia
Chair