



Governance, Audit, Risk Management and Standards Committee

Minutes

29 November 2023

Present:

Chair: Councillor Kanti Rabadia

Councillors: Ghazanfar Ali Rashmi Kalu
Philip Benjamin Kuha Kumaran

**Present virtually:
(Councillors)** Yogesh Teli Dr Antonio Weiss

96. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

97. Declarations of Interest

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

98. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2023, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

99. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received.

100. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions had been received.

101. Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations had been received.

102. References from Council and other Committees/Panels

RESOLVED: To note that no references were received.

103. 2021/22 Statement of Accounts

The Committee received a report which presented the audited Statement of Accounts for 2021-22.

The Interim Director of Finance and Assurance introduced the report and drew attention to the fact that this was the final Statement of Accounts for 2021-2022 explaining that this was the last time that the Committee would see these Accounts.

The Interim Director of Finance and Assurance then went on to provide Members with a summary of each of the appendices as well as pointing out the relevant page numbers for each of these. Attention was drawn to Appendix 3C on Page 271 and Appendix 4C on Page 313 which set out the draft audit opinion.

Members were then provided an update regarding the changes to the Accounts since this last went to the Committee in September 2023. It was confirmed that these changes were set out in paragraph 5 on Page 13, and this was in relation to community assets.

The External Auditor from Mazars was then invited to provide any additional comments. The Auditor explained that the work on the value for money had now been completed, however at the time of the report being published this was still outstanding.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Audit Completion Updates of the External Auditor on matters arising from the audit of the Statement of Accounts 2021- 22 and the Pension Fund Annual Report 2021-22 were considered;
- (2) the audited Statement of Accounts 2021-22 be approved and authorise the signing thereof by the Chair;
- (3) the Pension Fund Annual Report 2021-22 be noted;
- (4) the Director of Finance and Assurance, following consultation with the Chair be authorised, to make any final minor amendments to the

104. Annual Complaints Report and Update on Complaints against Members 2022/23

The Committee received a joint report from the Monitoring Officer and the Assistant Director for Digital, Data and the Customer Experience which provided an overview of complaints received throughout 2022-23 and complaints against Councillors for this period.

The Assistant Director for Digital, Data and the Customer Experience introduced the report explaining that during this period the Council handled nearly 6 million customer enquiries and had over 20 million interactions with residents.

Members were informed that last year the Council had received 2,313 complaints at stage 1, 128 at stage 2 where the resident was not happy with the response from stage 1, and it was highlighted that 81% of these were responded to within timescales. Members were then provided with an overview of where the complaints originated from:

70% from the Place directorate
20% from Resources and Finance directorate
10% from the People directorate

The Assistant Director for Digital, Data and the Customer Experience drew attention to the fact that there had been cross- Council working throughout the year to improve things for residents.

The Monitoring Officer then went onto provide the Committee with an update regarding complaints received against Councillors which were set out on pages 374 and 375. During this period, 4 complaints were received against elected Members and no evidence was found of a breach of the Members code of conduct in any of the cases.

Members were provided with a summary for the process when complaints were received against Councillors. In the first instance, the complaint would come into the Monitoring Officer who speaks to the Councillor about the complaint and then consults with the independent person to come to a view on the complaint.

In response to questions from Members it was clarified that:

- After stage 2 of the complaints process, if the resident was still unhappy, then they could contact the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman and it was confirmed that at stage 2 complaint a letter was sent out to residents signposting them to this process.

- When a complaint is received against a Councillor, the Monitoring Officer would email the Councillor directly summarising the complaint to seek the Councillor's side of the story.
- Residents could visit the Council's website at harrow.gov.uk/complaints to understand how the complaints process worked.

RESOLVED: That the information in the report be noted.

105. Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2023/24

The Committee received a report which provided an update of the Council's Treasury Management activities in 2023/24 in compliance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Treasury Management Code of Practice.

The Interim Director of Finance and Assurance introduced the report explaining that the report looks at the treasury management activity as of 30 September 2023. Members were informed that it was a requirement for the treasury management report to go to the GARMS Committee and it was noted that 3 separate reports were received each year.

Members were then provided with an overview of the key facts and figures as presented in the Treasury Management Mid – Year report for 2023/24.

In response to questions from Members it was clarified that:

- The forecast outturn was a more realistic figure to look at than the revised budget.
- The term slippage referred to a situation whereby money would be spent the following financial year rather than the current one.
- If there was an underspend, this meant that the money was not going to be spent at all. It was clarified that the Council had very little underspend.
- The rise in the rate of return of investments was partially because of the rise in inflation, however, a higher bank of England base rate was the key reason for the increase in the rate of investments.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Mid-Year Treasury Management position for 2023/24 be noted;
- (2) the report be referred to Cabinet for noting.

106. Any Other Urgent Business

The Chair sought indication from the External Auditors regarding the Council's position regarding the 2022/23 Statement of Accounts as the 2021/2022 accounts had just been signed off.

The External Auditor clarified that this was not due to commence anytime before Christmas and explained that guidance was still being awaited from the Government regarding a potential backstop for the accounts to enable the sector to catch up.

It was clarified that the backstop applied, the Council would still be required to publish its draft accounts for 2022/23 and it was confirmed that these accounts would be reviewed at the next meeting in January 2024.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.30 pm, closed at 7.23 pm).

(Signed) Councillor Kanti Rabadia
Chair