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Minutes of the meeting of the **GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Thursday, 17 March 2022 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor D Hannent

Councillors: S H Beer
D A Hawkes
P D Jull

Also Present:

Officers: Head of Audit Partnership (East Kent Audit Partnership)
Deputy Head of Audit Partnership (East Kent Audit Partnership)
Head of Finance and Investment
Solicitor to the Council
Democratic and Corporate Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer

20 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

21 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute members appointed.

22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

23 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2021 were approved as a correct record for signing by the Chairman.

24 QUARTERLY INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE REPORT

The Deputy Head of Audit Partnership introduced the Quarterly Internal Audit Update Report to the Committee that provided a summary of the work completed by the East Kent Audit Partnership (EKAP) to 31 December 2021.

There had been seven internal audit reports undertaken during the period for which three received substantial assurance – Capital, EKS/Civica – Council Tax and EKS/Civica – Housing Benefit Payments. A reasonable assurance was given for the service provision regarding playgrounds, and it was noted there were well documented, robust and effective health and safety inspection processes in place. Members were keen for this service area to be monitored by Cabinet and Council to maintain the health and safety of the playgrounds. Of the remaining three audits, an assurance level was not applicable.

During the period five follow-up reviews were undertaken and none were below reasonable after completion. Tenant Health and Safety received substantial assurance following review having had all recommendations implemented.

It was reported to the Committee that up to 28 February 2022, 77.25% of the audit plan had been completed, with an estimate of being mid to high 90% plan completion at the end of the period.

RESOLVED: That the Quarterly Internal Audit Update Report be noted.

25 DRAFT INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2022-23

The Head of Audit Partnership presented the proposed Internal Audit Plan for 2022/23 which provided a breakdown of audits and an analysis of available days for the forthcoming twelve months.

Members were directed to the report which outlined the risks and considerations when preparing the plan which had been prepared in consultation with the Directors and Council's s.151 Officer. The plan had been modified to reflect emerging risks identified by the Chief Executive, Directors and links to the Corporate Plan and Corporate Risk Register and considered wider national issues such as climate change and environmental sustainability.

In terms of plan completion and the resources available, Members were assured that Internal Audit was in a position to complete the plan with the number of days proposed. The number of audits that could be carried out were limited each year and not all service areas could be audited, although other assurances were provided within the service areas, such as food safety checks, and Internal Audit was only one area that provided assurance. Members were satisfied with the position presented to them and were reluctant to make changes to the plan that would result in further expenditure and would monitor the position throughout the year.

Members were further assured that the Chief Executive, in consultation with HR, were looking at succession planning with regard to Cultural Erosion and a number of senior officers nearing retirement.

RESOLVED: That the Internal Audit Plan for 2022/23 be approved.

26 TREASURY MANAGEMENT QUARTER THREE REPORT 2021/22

The Head of Finance and Investment presented the Treasury Management Quarter Three Report for 2021/22 to the Committee for consideration. The report provided details of the Council's treasury management for the year ended 31 December 2021.

The Council's investment return for the period was £1,074k, and the total interest and dividends income forecast was £198k less than the original budget estimate of £1,673k. The Council had remained within its Treasury Management guideline and complied with the Prudential Code guidelines during the period.

With regard to the current situation in Ukraine and its impact, Members were assured that investments and returns were monitored closely and were reported in the budget and performance reports accordingly.

RESOLVED: That the Treasury Management Quarter Three Report 2021/22 is received and noted.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE BROADCAST OF MEETINGS

The Monitoring Officer presented the Arrangements for the Broadcast of Meetings report to the Committee. The report sought approval for the necessary Constitutional amendments to allow for permanent online broadcasting of some Executive, Council and Committee meetings. This followed an initial six-month trial period for testing the live broadcast of those meetings which was agreed at an extraordinary meeting of Council on 19 May 2021.

Members' attention was drawn to paragraphs 2.5 to 2.9 of the report which provided details of meetings of the bodies that were proposed to be broadcast and those, that due to the likely inclusion of significant personal information, would not be broadcast.

Members considered electronic voting and discussed the retention of votes. The electronic equipment did not currently retain Members' individual votes although the Democratic and Corporate Services Manager was seeking the possibility of this function with the suppliers. Members were reminded that votes could only be recorded in certain circumstances – by law and when requested by Members in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules and it was not proposed to use electronic voting for Recorded Votes.

It was not proposed that the broadcasts would be retained by the Council and would only be available to view live due to concerns that these broadcasts would require measures to be put in place to manage the archive and deal with Freedom of Information and Subject Access requests. The Monitoring Officer advised that this was a cautious approach and that there had been meticulous consideration to provide a robust position. Whilst other authorities were recording meetings, it was considered beneficial to this council to let the vanguard highlight any potential pitfalls and that officers would look further into the recording and retention of meetings.

RESOLVED: That the Governance Committee recommend to the Council that the Constitutional amendments set out in Appendix 1 of this report be approved and incorporated into the Council's Constitution (Issue 24).

The meeting ended at 6.50 pm.