

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

24 September 2015

- * Councillor Gordon Jackson (Chairman)
- * Councillor Jo Randall (Vice-Chairman)

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| * Councillor Philip Brooker | * Councillor Mike Hurdle |
| * Councillor Colin Cross | * Councillor Jennifer Jordan |
| * Councillor David Elms | * Maria Angel (Independent Member) |
| | * Ian Symes (Parish Member) |

*Present

CGS23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no apologies.

CGS24 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT - DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

CGS25 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee held on 23 July 2015 were confirmed and signed.

CGS26 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION COMPLIANCE UPDATE - SEPTEMBER 2015

At its meeting on 4 June 2015, the Committee resolved to receive regular reports to monitor the performance in dealing with Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, including some key indicators. The Committee considered the first of these reports, which showed the performance for each service and a total for the Council.

The report showed that in the calendar year 2015 up to 10 August, the Council had improved its performance for compliance for dealing with FOI and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) requests from 69% to 84%, compared to last year. This is just below the Information Commissioner's informal target of 85% compliance, and below the local target of 90% set by the Corporate Management Team.

Directors had agreed to ensure that overdue FOI requests in their service areas were resolved as soon as possible. The Chairman commented it would be good if all service areas achieved the same high level of performance by the time the Committee next considered the item.

The Committee recorded its congratulations to the team for improved response rate to FOI and EIR requests.

Having considered the report, the Committee

RESOLVED: To note the officer actions and continue to receive updates to ensure the Council meets its objectives of 90 per cent compliance.

CGS27 APPLICATION FOR DISPENSATION - COUNCILLOR GRAHAM ELLWOOD

The Committee considered a report concerning a request from Councillor Graham Ellwood for a dispensation to enable him to propose that £6,000 from Surrey County Council's Local Committee cluster funding was given to George Abbot School in order to contribute to the construction of a new gymnasium. Councillor Ellwood's register of interests included his wife's employment at George Abbot School.

The Committee considered the grounds for Councillor Ellwood's request, as set out in the appendix. The Committee noted that Councillor Ellwood would be making a recommendation to the Local Committee, rather than voting on the issue himself. The Committee also noted that Surrey County Council's Audit & Governance Committee had already granted a similar request for a dispensation, and it was the County that would award the proposed contributions, which would come from Councillor Ellwood's own County Council Councillor's Local Allowance.

Having considered the request, the report, and comments from the Monitoring Officer, the Committee

RESOLVED:

1. To grant Councillor Graham Ellwood the dispensation to enable him to participate in Guildford Local Committee "cluster meetings" for the specific purpose of considering a proposal to provide cluster funding for a project relating to George Abbot School.
2. That the dispensation will apply until 31 March 2016.

Reasons for the decision:

In light of the facts that:

1. the proposed funds would come from Councillor Ellwood's own Councillor Local Allowance
2. the request was in relation to what Councillor Ellwood had already declared on his register of interests

the Committee was satisfied that awarding the dispensation was in the interests of persons living in the borough and would not damage public confidence in the conduct of the authority's business.

CGS28 APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS (ETHICAL STANDARDS)

At its last meeting on 23 July 2015, the Committee agreed arrangements for the selection and interviewing of candidates for appointment as Independent Persons. The Committee also authorised the Monitoring Officer to establish a joint appointments panel with participating Surrey councils to short-list and interview candidates and make recommendations to the respective councils for the appointment of Independent Persons.

The Committee considered a report setting out the results of that process. The Committee were advised that of the three candidates that were shortlisted, one had withdrawn before the interviews had taken place. The remaining two candidates, Vivien Cameron and Bernard Quoroll had been selected by the appointments panel further to their interviews on 23 September 2015.

The Committee also considered a draft Independent Persons Protocol which sought to codify, amongst other matters, the appointment, role and obligations and allocation of Independent Persons by the participating councils, namely Mole Valley District Council, Spelthorne Borough

Council and Waverley Borough Council. The Protocol had already been adopted by those councils.

The Committee also discussed the role of parish members when dealing with complaints regarding members or co-opted members of parish councils. The Monitoring Officer advised that there was currently an independent review of the Council's processes and procedures for investigations of alleged misconduct, and this would be reported to the Committee at its next meeting in November 2015.

Having considered the report, the Committee

RESOLVED: To recommend that Council (7 October 2015):

- (1) considers the appointment of Vivienne Cameron and Bernard Quoroll as independent persons, as recommended by the joint appointments panel, for a term of office expiring in May 2019;
- (2) approves the Independent Persons Protocol, attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

Reason for decision:

For the Council to comply with its obligations under the Localism Act 2011 in respect of ethical standards and The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 in respect of dismissal arrangements for statutory officers.

CGS29 AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2014-15

The Committee considered the 2014-15 audited Statement of Accounts. The Committee had considered the draft Statement of Accounts at its last meeting on 23 July 2015. Since then, there had been changes to disclosure notes within the accounts, but no major changes to the main financial statements. Further amendments to disclosure notes were set out in the late sheet. The auditors did anticipate giving an unqualified opinion by 28 September 2015.

In response to queries from the Committee, officers advised that the financial risks outlined in the report reflect the current national economic risks affecting most councils, including an increase in housing benefit claimants and those in severe financial hardship. Officers also explained the difference between the pension figures stated in the accounts and the triennial valuation done by the actuary on the pension scheme.

Having considered the report and the 2014-15 audited Statement of Accounts, the Committee

RESOLVED :

1. to approve the Statement of Accounts 2014-15, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, and;
2. that the Chairman of the Committee sign the official copy of the accounts to state they are approved.

Reason for decision

To comply with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011 to approve the statutory Statement of Accounts by 30 September 2015.

CGS30 AUDIT FINDINGS REPORT 2014-15

The Committee considered a report by the external auditor, Grant Thornton LLP, detailing their findings for the year ending 31 March 2015, and the management response included in the action plan. The external auditor highlighted the changes to the report that had been included in

the late sheet. These included a small number of corrections relating to the disclosure notes within the accounts. The auditors had not found any adjustments that affected our reported financial position, but did identify some improvements to disclosure notes, which officers amended for the final set of accounts with recommendations on our internal controls.

The auditors intended to issue an unqualified opinion and unqualified Value for Money conclusion.

Further to a query from the Committee regarding the software issues surrounding employee remuneration, the Head of Financial Services explained that issue arose when a member of staff had joined the organisation after the 15th of the month, which was the Council's pay date. The software had miscalculated the value of superannuation which affected the taxable pay, but as this was done on a monthly basis, the error was adjusted manually to avoid an incorrect amount being paid to HMRC. However, the Council was still in discussion with the payroll software provider to find a resolution instead of using manual intervention.

The Committee had no comment on the letter of representation.

Having considered the report and the material contained in the late sheet, including the findings report and the letter of representation in the appendices, the Committee:

RESOLVED:

1. To note the Grant Thornton Audit findings report and the management responses provided in the action plan and
2. To approve the letter of representation on behalf of the Council.

The Chief Finance Officer and the Monitoring Officer were due to sign the letter of representation on 28 September.

Reason for decision

To allow the external auditor to issue his opinion on the 2014-15 accounts.

CGS31 FINANCIAL MONITORING 2015-16, PERIOD 3

Further to a review of the Council's governance arrangements and improve the Council's transparency of financial monitoring, the role of the Committee's terms of reference was expanded in July 2015 to include monitoring the Council's finances during the year.

The Committee considered a report that set out the results of the Council's financial monitoring for period 3 (April to June) for the 2015-16 financial year. The report covered:

- (a) general fund revenue monitoring
- (b) general fund capital monitoring
- (c) housing revenue account monitoring and
- (d) treasury management activity monitoring.

Having considered the report, the Committee

RESOLVED:

To note the results of the Council's financial monitoring for the period April to June 2015.

Reason for the decision

To allow the Committee to undertake its role in relation to scrutinising the Council's finances.

CGS32 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its draft work programme for the remainder of the 2015-16 municipal year. The committee noted that, further to what was agreed under minute CGS28 (Appointment of Independent Persons (Ethical Standards)), it would consider the independent review of the Council's processes and procedures for investigations of alleged misconduct and at its next meeting.

Having considered the report and the proposed work programme, the Committee

RESOLVED: To approve the work programme.

The meeting finished at 7.58 pm

Signed

Chairman

Date