

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

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

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| * Councillor Philip Brooker | * Mrs Maria Angel |
| * Councillor Colin Cross | Mr Charles Hope |
| * Councillor David Elms | * Ms Gerry Reffo |
| * Councillor Mike Hurdle | Mr Ian Symes |
| * Councillor Jennifer Jordan | |

*Present

CGS51 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Charles Hope and Mr Ian Symes.

CGS54 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT - DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

CGS55 MINUTES

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2016. The Chairman signed the minutes.

CGS56 REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR INVESTIGATING ALLEGATIONS OF BREACHES OF THE COUNCILLORS' CODE OF CONDUCT

The Committee considered the report on the Working Group's consideration of the Review of Guildford Borough Council's Procedures for handling complaints that members may have breached the Code of Conduct.

The Chairman, Councillor Gordon Jackson thanked the members of the Working Group and the officers involved for their time and noted that it had been a very positive and useful exercise, with unanimous agreement on all of the items of the report.

The Committee,

RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council

1. That the report be agreed and implemented
2. That the Hearings Sub-Committee should not be politically proportional; but rather the aim should be for political diversity
3. To note that further work is required in the following areas and that the Committee (acting through the Working Group) be authorised to carry out, finalise and implement such work:
 - a) A revision of the Protocol for Independent Persons adopted by Full Council on 7 October 2015 and an associated briefing document.
 - b) Guidelines and policy for communications; together with guides for the complainant and member-complained-of.
 - c) Assistance as regards any statements relating to standards and the private capacity of members.
 - d) A protocol with the Police where a complainant alleges criminal behaviour.

- e) The redrafting of the Council's arrangements for dealing with allegations that a member has failed to comply with its code of conduct ("the Arrangements") to incorporate the Report and the work described in the preceding paragraphs
- f) That such redrafting might usefully include a separate version of the Arrangements containing only those elements relevant to allegations of misconduct by parish councillors.

Reason for decision: To comply with the former Leader's request for a review and to ensure that the Council's arrangements remain fit for purpose and in accordance with best practice.

CGS57 PETITION SCHEME - DEALING WITH E-PETITIONS

The Committee considered a report detailing options for further amendments to the Council's Petition Scheme, to clarify the process for dealing with e-petitions not hosted on the Council's website.

Questions from the Committee raised the following points and information.

- The Committee was informed that the Council's e-petitions facility would only allow those with valid postcodes in the borough to sign an e-petition. It was very simple for a member of the public to submit a petition using the Council's facility.
- When a petition was submitted to the Council using change.org, officers were required to go through each signature individually, checking that the postcode provided is located within the borough. This took a significant amount of time.
- The Council's e-petition facility would allow the Council to keep in contact with each person who had signed the e-petition. If an e-petition was referred for debate at a Full Council meeting then those who signed it could be informed of when this debate would take place and updated on the outcome of the debate.
- Requirements for submitting a valid petition and restrictions on the types of petition that may be submitted were set out in the Council's petition scheme.
- The Committee heard that members of the public would be able to promote a petition that was live on the Council's website using social media. In the past, petitions on the Council's website had easily reached the target of 500 signatories, which triggered a debate at a meeting of Full Council.

The Committee,

RESOLVED to recommend to Council that the petition scheme be amended to make it explicitly clear that the Council will not accept e-petitions hosted by third parties (for example, change.org), or accept as paper petitions information about e-signatories downloaded from third party e-petition hosts.

Reason for decision: To ensure that the Council's processes for responding to petitions and e-petitions remain robust and fit for purpose.

CGS58 AUDIT REPORT ON THE CERTIFICATION OF FINANCIAL CLAIMS AND RETURNS 2014-15: HOUSING BENEFIT SUBSIDY AND POOLING HOUSING CAPITAL RECEIPTS

The Committee considered an audit report on the certification of financial claims and returns for 2014-15.

The Benefits Manager gave a presentation summarising how housing benefit subsidy works, the causes and prevention of errors and future subsidy audits.

Questions from the Committee raised the following points and information:

- The software contained a number of checks to help reduce errors, however there was a limit to what these checks could achieve. The Committee was informed that the external auditors had examined this issue and would provide guidance on which checks should be used.
- The external auditors were reassured that, following discussions with officers, positive processes had been put in place to address the errors that had been found. The auditors' recommendations within the report had all been implemented in full.
- The Committee heard that as a result of the qualification of the Housing Benefit Subsidy claim, the auditors had undertaken additional checking and this had resulted in a fee of £16,000.

The Committee,

RESOLVED

- 1) To note the position regarding the certification of claims and returns for 2014-15, and
- 2) To approve the additional audit fee of £16,000 claimed by Grant Thornton.

Reason for decision: To formally sign off the claims and returns for 2014-15.

CGS59 FINANCIAL MONITORING 2015-16 PERIOD 10

The Committee considered a report that summarised the financial monitoring position for period 10 (April 2015 – January 2016).

The Committee heard that the government had made adjustments to the inclusion of certain rate reliefs in the calculation for the amount of growth above the business rates baseline. This had caused the corresponding increase in the levy.

The Committee,

RESOLVED to note the results of the Council's financial monitoring for the period April 2015 to January 2016.

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

CGS60 EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN AND AUDIT UPDATE 2015-16

The Committee considered the annual audit plan for 2015-16 and the Audit Update, both prepared by the Council's external auditors, Grant Thornton.

The Committee heard that officers were not expecting a large impact on the surplus assets as a result of the new accounting standard on fair value. The valuation report had not yet been received.

The Committee,

RESOLVED ,

1. To approve the external audit plan submitted by Grant Thornton and the fee set out on page 22, Appendix 1 of the report
2. To note the content of the External Auditor's update report.

Reason for Decision: To enable the Committee to consider and comment on the planned audit fee, work programme and update report.

CGS61 ENQUIRIES OF THOSE CHARGED WITH GOVERNANCE

The Committee considered a report by the external auditors, Grant Thornton, on their discussions with those charged with governance.

The Committee,

RESOLVED to approve the responses to Grant Thornton provided in the Discussions with Those Charged with Governance document at Appendix 1 to the report submitted to the Committee.

Reason for Decision: To enable the Council's external auditors, Grant Thornton, to carry out their duties under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the auditors must be provided with the necessary assurances required under International Standards on Auditing (ISA), particularly, ISA 260, Communication with Those Charged with Governance.

CGS62 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme covering the 2016-2017 municipal year.

The Committee,

RESOLVED to approve the work programme.

Reason for decision: To allow the Committee to approve its work programme for the 2016-17 municipal year.

The meeting finished at 8.15 pm

Signed

Date

Chairman