

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

31 January 2017

- * Councillor Nigel Manning (Chairman)
- * Councillor Jo Randall (Vice-Chairman)

*Councillor Philip Brooker
Councillor Alexandra Chesterfield
*Councillor Colin Cross
*Councillor Geoff Davis
Councillor Mike Hurdle

* Mrs Maria Angel
* Mr Charles Hope
Ms Geraldine Reffo
Mr Ian Symes

*Present

The Lead Councillor for Finance, Councillor Michael Illman, was also in attendance.

CGS49 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Alexandra Chesterfield and Mike Hurdle and from Ms Geraldine Reffo and Mr Ian Symes.

CGS50 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT - DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

CGS51 MINUTES

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2016. The Chairman signed the minutes.

CGS52 FINANCIAL MONITORING 2016-17 PERIOD 8 (APRIL TO NOVEMBER 2016)

The Committee considered a report that set out the financial monitoring position for period 8 (April to November 2016).

The report summarised the projected outturn position for the Council's general fund revenue account, based on actual and accrued data for this period. At the end of November 2016, officers were projecting a reduction in net expenditure on the general fund revenue account of £2.23 million. This was the result of a combination of factors, which included a reduction in employee expenditure across all services, an increase in planning fees, higher than budgeted income from parking activities and additional rental income arising from the asset investment strategy. The Council had also received higher than budgeted interest receipts from its investments.

A surplus on the Housing Revenue Account, due to lower staffing and repairs and maintenance costs would enable a projected transfer of £11.84 million to the new build reserve and reserve for future capital at year-end.

Officers were making progress against significant capital projects on the approved programme as outlined in section 7 of the report. The Council was now expected to spend £54.91 million on its capital schemes by the end of the financial year.

The Council's underlying need to borrow to finance the capital programme was expected to be £44.69 million by 31 March 2017, against an estimated position of £88.98 million.

The Council held £131.3 million of investments and £231.2 million of external borrowing as at 30 November 2016, which included £194 million of Housing Revenue Account loans. Officers confirmed that the Council had complied with its Prudential indicators in the period, which were set in February 2016 as part of the Council's Treasury Management Strategy, with the exception of the upper limit on variable interest rates. This was due to having more variable rate debt than investments due to using more fixed deposits than variable rate investments.

Having considered the report, the Committee

RESOLVED: That the results of the Council's financial monitoring for the period April to November 2016, be noted.

Reason for Decision

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

CGS53 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION COMPLIANCE UPDATE

The Committee considered an update report on the monitoring of the Council's performance in dealing with Freedom of Information (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) requests. The Committee also noted the updated statistical information on the Supplementary Information sheet to reflect figures for the whole of 2016 rather than the cut-off point of 19 December 2016 as stated in the report.

The Committee was informed that, for the calendar year 2016, the Council's performance rate for responding to FOI requests within the 20 working day deadline stood at 89%, which compared favourably with the figure of 81% recorded at the end of 2015. The Council therefore met the Information Commissioner's performance indicator of 85%, but fell slightly short of the 90% target agreed by the Corporate Management Team.

The Committee also noted the comparative statistical information on the Supplementary Information sheet for local authorities in Surrey for 2016.

Questions and comments from the Committee raised the following points and information:

- There would be additional training provided for those service managers whose performance in responding to FOI requests fell short of acceptable standards, and persistent poor performance should be dealt with under existing performance management arrangements
- In future, the Committee would receive a six monthly update report at its July meeting setting out statistical information for the period January to June and an annual report in January setting out performance information for the period January to December of the previous year. These reports would highlight the reasons for any poor performance in particular services and provide details of remedial measures put in place to improve performance.

The Committee,

RESOLVED: That the actions taken by officers be noted and that, in future, the Committee receives a six monthly update report at its July meeting setting out statistical information on FOI performance for the period January to June, and an annual report in January setting out performance information for the period January to December of the previous year, as described above.

Reasons for Decision:

- To ensure that the Committee is kept up to date with developments in the FOI/EIR framework
- To ensure that the Committee has the necessary information to enable requests for information to be made easily to the Council and properly responded to
- To assist with learning lessons and improving performance following requests for information made to the Council

CGS54 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER REGARDING STANDARDS ALLEGATIONS

The Committee received and noted the first annual report from the Monitoring Officer about decisions taken on standards allegations against borough and parish councillors for the 12-month period ending 31 December 2016.

There were no particular areas of concern upon which the Committee would like further information and/or further work carried out.

Accordingly, the Committee

RESOLVED: That the cases referred to in Appendix 1 to the report submitted to the Committee be noted.

Reasons for Decision:

- To ensure members of the Committee and others to whom the report is circulated are kept up to date
- To consider learning points for the future
- To seek to promote and maintain high standards of conduct amongst Members

CGS55 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme for the remainder of the 2016-17 municipal year, and a draft work programme for the 2017-18 municipal year.

Having noted two suggested amendments to the work programme which were set out on the Supplementary Information sheet circulated at the meeting, together with a further suggestion from the Director of Resources, the Committee,

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee's work programme for 2016-17, be amended by the inclusion of the Audit Report on the Certification of Financial Claims and Returns 2015-16 in respect of Housing Benefit Subsidy for the 30 March 2017 meeting.
- (2) That the Committee's work programme for 2017-18, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report submitted to the Committee, be amended by bringing forward:
 - (a) the FOI report scheduled for 21 September 2017 to the 27 July 2017 meeting thus achieving a 6 monthly cycle of such reports; and as referred to in Minute CGS53 above; and
 - (b) the Single Equality Scheme and Action Plan scheduled for 23 November 2017 to the 21 September 2017 meeting

Reason for decision:

To allow the Committee to maintain and update its work programme for the 2016-17 municipal year.

The meeting finished at 7.33 pm

Signed

Chairman

Date