

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 26TH JANUARY, 2022

A MEETING of the AUDIT COMMITTEE was held at the COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICE, WATERDALE, DONCASTER DN1 3BU, on WEDNESDAY, 26TH JANUARY, 2022, at 10.00 am.

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Austen White
Vice-Chair - Councillor Glenn Bluff

Councillors Barry Johnson and Dave Shaw.

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sophie Liu and from Co-Opted Member, Kathryn Smart.

Also in Attendance:

Debbie Hogg – Director of Corporate Resources
Scott Cardwell – Assistant Director of Development
Scott Fawcus – Monitoring Officer
Peter Jackson – Head of Internal Audit
Helen Potts – Principal Legal Officer
Dab Swaine – Director of Economy & Environment
Dave Stimpson – Head of Service, Property
Kellie Hopkins – Assistant Director of Environment
Nasir Dad – Head of Regulation & Enforcement
Dave Webster – Head of Internal Audit, RMBC
Julie Crook – Director of Corporate Services, SLHD
Trevor Mason – Chair of SLHD Audit Committee

32 **Declarations of Interest, if any**

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

33 **Minutes of the meeting held on 26th November 2021.**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 November, 2021 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

34 **Audit Committee Action Log.**

The Committee considered a report that updated Members on actions agreed during previous audit committees.

Members noted that one action had been completed. The only remaining item was scheduled to be considered at the April 2022 meeting of the Audit Committee and would be then removed from the log.

RESOLVED that the Audit Committee note the progress being made against the actions agreed at previous meetings of the Committee.

35 Covert Surveillance - Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) Update.

The Audit Committee were presented with the update report on Covert Surveillance – Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 200 (RIPA). The update report is received 6-monthly by the Committee in order that they can review the Council’s use of surveillance and ensure that it is only being used where it is proper and correct to do so.

The report informed the Committee that there had been just one surveillance application authorised since the last report to Audit Committee in July 2021, and related to illicit sales of with the surveillance carried out by Trading Standards. Members noted that information obtained as a result, would be reviewed and any appropriate action taken.

The report also detailed the anticipated inspection by the Investigatory Powers Commissioners Officer. The last inspection had taken place in March 2019, and therefore another one was due shortly. Communication had been received from the Inspectors Office and a virtual meeting had been arranged to discuss the papers that had been submitted and it was envisaged that the inspection would also be held virtually. The Principal Legal Officer outlined that she was confident that all processes were followed properly, all the required measures were in place, and it was hoped that they would be satisfied with the information already provided.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The Audit Committee note that the Council has had one surveillance application authorised under RIPA since the last report to the Audit Committee on 29 July, 2021; and
- 2) The Audit Committee note that the Investigatory Powers Commissioners Office had contacted the Chief Executive in November 2021 to discuss the arrangement of an inspection. The date for this has yet to be confirmed.

36 External Quality Assessment of the Council's Internal Audit Service.

The Committee was asked to consider the External Quality Assessment report of the Council’s Internal Audit Service, which had been undertaken by the Head of Internal Audit at Rotherham Council, David Webster, who was in attendance at the meeting to present his report to the Committee.

The report confirmed that the assessment confirmed that Doncaster had received the highest of the three possible ratings against conformance with the United Kingdom Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and Code of Ethics. ‘Generally Conforms’ which meant that Doncaster’s Audit arrangements were judged to be in conformance with standards. This assessment allows Doncaster Council and St Leger Homes to have confidence that the service is professionally competent to meet their internal audit needs.

Members noted that there had been some recommendations within the report, but these were purely suggestions for improvement and nothing that was deemed necessary. Officers however, informed members that they would be provided with full details of these once the action plan had been completed.

The Chief Executive, Damian Allen was in attendance at the meeting, and conveyed his thanks to David Webster for his diligence and insight, as did the Chair, Councillor Austen White, on behalf of the Audit Committee.

RESOLVED that the Audit Committee note the contents of the assessment and approve the action plan.

37 Internal Audit Progress Report for the period: October 2021 to December 2021.

The Committee were presented with a report that providing an update on the work undertaken by Internal Audit for the period of September to December 2021.

The report considered, was broken down into four sections as follows, which the Head of Internal Audit talked on individually:-

- The Audit Plan / Revisions to the Plan
- Audit Work Undertaken during the period
- Implementation of Management Actions arising from Audit recommendations;
and
- Internal Audit Performance

The Committee was updated on the work undertaken during the period, and Members noted the areas that had been covered.

The main focus of discussion however, centred on Section 3 of the report, particularly in relation to Trading Standards and Food and Animal Safety and Officers from the Directorate attended to clarify the position and respond to Members concerns. The Director of Economy and Environment, Dan Swaine, responded to Members following the course of the discussions as there was widespread opinion voiced by the Committee that improvements were not being made quickly enough. However, assurances were given that this would not be so moving forward and looked to instil confidence that things were in the process of changing. Whilst the environment that teams had been working in was very different for the best part of two years, new working practices had now been put into place, and clear actions set out for moving forward.

A lengthy discussion continued as Members shared the same concerns and they felt clarity was needed as to the timescales expected for improvements to be made, by who and when. Members accepted that whilst Covid had made the normal working practices more difficult, they now had to make to improvements and officers were explicit in their response that these were in hand and whilst they were challenging, the work was being done to implement the actions.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Audit Committee note the content of the Internal Audit Plan;
- 2) The internal audit work completed in the period be noted;
- 3) The position with regard to the implementation of management actions arising from Internal Audit Recommendations be noted;
- 4) The current position regarding the ability to deliver the annual opinion over the Council's risk, governance and control arrangements be noted; and

- 5) The Corporate Director of Environment and Economy to develop a detailed action plan setting out the actions taken, responsible officer and agreed deadlines and provide this on a monthly basis.

38 Progress Report on North Bridge Stores Transformation Project.

A report was provided to Members with regard to progress made on the North Bridge Stores Transformation Project. Scott Cardwell, Assistant Director Development and Dave Stimpson, Head of Service attended the meeting in order to update Members as to the current position and alleviate any further concerns.

Members noted this was the third update that had been provided to the Committee and progress had been made since the last report. New operating procedures were now in place, and big improvements had been made across the board, with particular emphasis on the stock take with a more positive outcome from the September stocktake.

A customer satisfaction survey had been carried out at the request of the Audit Committee and this had proven to be successful and had formed a good starting point on which to make further improvements. Staff development was ongoing with training and recruitment and they had placed emphasis on ensuring they had the right staff in the right places. However, now they were looking to move forward to 'business as usual' and make further improvements as the plans settled into place and the Audit Committee would be provided with a further update at their next meeting, which would also provide performance information through the service's Key Performance Indicators.

Members were reassured by the progress made, and they acknowledged there had been a lot of work done on this outstanding issue in order to ensure progress was made. The Committee raised the potential of undertaking a site visit to the North Bridge Stores in order to witness first-hand the work that had been carried out and give their support to the service who had been committed to making improvements.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Audit Committee note the updated report and support the outlined approach.

CHAIR: _____

DATE: _____