

## STANDARDS AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

12 MARCH 2020

(7.15 pm - 9.13 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Peter McCabe (in the Chair),  
Councillor Adam Bush, Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina,  
Councillor Ben Butler, Councillor John Dehaney,  
Councillor Dickie Wilkinson, Councillor David Williams,  
Councillor Hina Bokhari, Councillor Thomas Barlow and  
Councillor Pauline Cowper

ALSO PRESENT Katy Willison – Independent Person

Suresh Patel – External Auditor

Margaret Culleton (Head of Internal Audit), John Bosley  
(Assistant Director Public Space Contracts and Commissioning),  
Roger Kershaw (Assistant Director of Resources), Louise Round  
(Managing Director, South London Legal Partnership and  
Monitoring Officer) and Amy Dumitrescu (Democratic Services  
Officer)

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Mary Curtin and Councillor Brenda Fraser.  
Councillor Stan Anderson attended as substitute.

Apologies were also received from Independent Person Clive Douglas.

At the start of the meeting, the Chair welcomed Katy Willison, Independent Person  
and Louise Round, Monitoring Officer and Managing Director South London Legal  
Partnership, to their first meeting of the Committee.

### 2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

### 3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2019 were agreed  
as a correct record.

### 4 EXTERNAL AUDIT PLANS FOR COUNCIL AND PENSION FUND ACCOUNTS (Agenda Item 4)

The External Auditor presented the report and gave an overview of the audit risks  
identified for the audit of the Council accounts and the Pension Fund accounts.

The External Auditor highlighted the deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) noting that this was a national issue. The auditors were in discussions nationally and with the Council in regards to the level of this deficit.

The Auditors had worked hard with officers to put together a timeline to ensure the accounts were closed by the July 2020 deadline and had resources planned to achieve this and the work was currently on track. *(Post meeting note: The accounting deadline has now changed to September 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic).*

The External Auditor informed the Committee that following EY responding to a tender relating to a review of Air Quality, he had assessed this and discussed it with officers and confirmed this did not threaten his independence to any level requiring further safeguards to be put in place.

In response to member questions, the External Auditor advised that although the level of materiality which had been tested was reduced slightly from 2% of expenditure to 1.8%, this was usual for Local Authorities of this size and if there had been any concerns with the accuracy of the accounts this figure would be reduced much further. It was the firm's approach for Pension Funds to be tested at the lower level of 1%.

In response to further questions, the External Auditor highlighted the further work which had been undertaken and therefore reflected in the fees as outlined within the report.

In relation to the Pension Fund accounts, the External Auditor advised there was a new risk identified relating to a new investment made by the Council and these are more difficult to value and obtain assurance for and so this had been identified as a new risk. Expert advice had been sought on the matter.

## 5 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN (Agenda Item 5)

The Head of Internal Audit presented the report, noting that a number of new audits had been requested for the upcoming year.

In response to member questions, the Assistant Director of Resources advised that contingency and resilience plans were being worked on to respond to the Coronavirus outbreak.

RESOLVED: That members reviewed and commented upon the 2020/21 Draft Internal Audit Plan, Strategy and Charter.

## 6 INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

The Head of Internal Audit presented the report noting that any audits which had received limited assurance had been summarised within the report.

In response to member questions, the Assistant Director of Public Space advised that in relation to the tree audit, a tree strategy would be produced as well as tree

monitoring. Members expressed that further information should be included on the Council's website to enable residents to assess whether they met the criteria before applying.

Officers outlined the further work being undertaken following the other audits which had received limited assurance results.

RESOLVED: That Members noted the report and commented upon matters arising from the Internal Audit Progress Report.

## 7 ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING POLICY REVIEW (Agenda Item 7)

The Head of Internal Audit presented the report, advising the policy was due for review and gave an overview of the amendments and updates.

Members asked whether any training was being provided on the policy and the Head of Internal Audit responded that training was provided for the South London Legal Partnership a number of years ago and also to the Cash and Bank team on the changes. A risk assessment would be undertaken to see if there were any other areas identified which required training.

RESOLVED: That Members commented on and approved the revised Anti money laundering policy.

## 8 CHANGES TO THE MERTON PENSION BOARD- TERMS OF REFERENCE (Agenda Item 8)

The Assistant Director of Resources presented the report noting that a number of Local Authorities had an Independent Chair of their Pension Boards.

In response to concerns regarding the costs, the Assistant Director advised that this was currently being negotiated, however it had been found that other authorities were paying similar amounts. The interaction between the pension board and the advisory panel was currently a concern and the Chair would look at this as well as the administration of the pension fund which is currently undertaken by Wandsworth Council. Officers wanted to ensure proper governance in the work going forward and to ensure the panel was given the opportunity to be held to account.

Members requested a further period of consultation including with the Chair of the Pension Investment Advisory Panel and for a number of additions to the report including the addition of tracked changes to show the proposed amendments. The recommendations were therefore not agreed and a further report would be brought back to the Committee at the next meeting.

## 9 ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENTS UPDATE (Agenda Item 9)

The Assistant Director of Public Space presented the report and tabled some additional information which has been attached as a supplementary agenda. The Assistant Director noted that the Council was performing highly for actions associated with FPNs (Fixed Penalty Notices), noting from the ward analysis that higher levels were associated with locations in town centres or transport hubs. It was noted that it

was difficult to capture credible information to pursue further enforcement action in the majority of the publically reported fly-tipping incidents, however there had been one successful formal Court prosecution for fly-tipping since September 2019.

In response to member questions, the Assistant Director of Public Space responded:

- Information on FPNs issued is publicised on the website and further links are included within the supplemental information tabled at the meeting. A communications strategy was currently being looked at to ensure information was provided throughout the year.
- The Cabinet Member had agreed the introduction of the Envirocrime award which would offer members of the public rewards for providing information which led to a prosecution, with different levels depending on whether this was for fly-tipping or littering, with a maximum reward of up to £500. In response to further questions it was confirmed that any reports would have to be supported by a witness statement and/or the ability to attend Court proceedings.
- As part of the Flytipping strategy, the Council were looking at a Youtube channel of CCTV footage and images which members of the public could respond to with information on the offenders.
- The re-procurement of the Enforcement contract was currently being undertaken by officers.
- It was unlikely that the prosecution would ever cover the associated costs of the process of clearing and prosecuting any fly-tipper, although the legal costs for the prosecution could be claimed back through a costs order at the magistrates court.

Members thanked officers for their work and for the letter which had recently been produced to approach estate agents as suggested at the previous meeting.

RESOLVED: The Committee reviewed and commented on the further update of environmental prosecutions as outlined in the report.

## 10 AMENDMENTS TO THE APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE AND THE EMPLOYEE PROCEDURE RULES (Agenda Item 10)

The Monitoring Officer presented the report and gave an overview of the recommendations which sought to resolve a couple of anomalies which had been found during a recent recruitment process.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Monitoring Officer advised that there was no legal requirement for the Monitoring Officer appointment to be agreed by Full Council and that currently any cross-borough appointments for shared services would have stakeholder panel input and are governed by the inter-authority agreement.

Some members expressed that they wanted to retain the current arrangements where Full Council agreed the appointment of Monitoring Officer.

Members wished to have further information provided on the changes proposed and further detail on the process of Senior Officer appointments before making a decision.

The recommendations were therefore not agreed, and the report would be revised and brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

#### 11 SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILLORS (Agenda Item 11)

The Monitoring Officer presented the report, advising that whilst a breach of the guidance wouldn't automatically be a breach of the code of conduct, it could be considered as part of any complaint received.

Members felt that it was important to have guidance however wished for the political groups to be consulted on the proposed guidance before it came back to Committee in July.

Members also requested that information be added to the guidance for Councillors who felt threatened on social media before it was brought back to Committee.

The recommendations were therefore not agreed and the report would be brought back to a later Committee meeting.

#### 12 COMPLAINTS AGAINST MEMBERS (Agenda Item 12)

The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that there had been no complaints against members received since the last meeting.

#### 13 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 13)

The Work Programme was noted.