

STANDARDS AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
15 MARCH 2018

(7.15 pm - 8.20 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Peter McCabe (in the Chair),
Councillor Janice Howard, Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina,
Councillor John Bowcott, Councillor Mary Curtin,
Councillor John Dehaney, Councillor Mary-Jane Jeanes,
Councillor Ian Munn, Councillor Gregory Udeh,
Councillor Martin Whelton, Councillor David Williams and
Councillor Najeeb Latif.

Independent Person – Pam Donovan

Suresh Patel – External Auditor – Ernst Young

ALSO PRESENT Paul Evans – Assistant Director of Corporate Governance
Roger Kershaw – Interim Assistant Director of Resources
Andrew Hamilton – Audit Manager
Gaynor Fleming – Quality and Performance Manager
Kim Brown – HR Lead
Amy Dumitrescu – Democratic Services Officer

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Adam Bush. Councillor Najeeb Latif attended as substitute.

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 9 November 2017 are agreed as an accurate record.

4 2017/18 MERTON COUNCIL AUDIT PLAN (Agenda Item 4)

The External Auditor presented the report, highlighting the new risks detailed in the report and invited questions and comments.

5 2017/18 MERTON PENSION FUND AUDIT PLAN (Agenda Item 5)

The External Auditor presented the report advising that this had been through the Pensions Committee and invited questions and comments.

6 2016/17 ANNUAL CERTIFICATION REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

The External Auditor presented the report and advised that of the £87m claim, an amendment of £315 had been identified which had to be reported, though the Auditor noted that this was a minor amount and similar to last year.

The External Auditor noted that this year was the final year of the current contract and that from 2018/19 the Council would need to appoint their own reporting accountant. External Audit were currently compiling a quote to do this work for submission to the Director of Corporate Services.

The Quality and Performance Manager advised the Committee that staff had been provided with training to minimise any errors but noted that some of the errors were from historic assessments.

7 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2018/19 (Agenda Item 7)

The Audit Manager presented the report advising this was an annual report. The Audit Manager noted that there had been a reduction in days to 765 however reassured the Committee that the Head of Internal Audit was satisfied with the level of resource and this could be achieved through the 5-Borough partnership.

The Audit Manager advised there were a number of new pieces of work due to be undertaken including a review of the processes for the new GDPR regulations due to come into force in May 2018 as well as the Governance arrangements for the Local Authority Property Company.

Members asked what work would be carried out in regards to contract procurement specifically in relation to the Veolia Contract and the Audit Manager responded that work would be undertaken across the South London Waste Partnership Boroughs to assess value for money and contract compliance.

Members asked questions regarding the cycle of audits and provision for responding to one-off issues. The Audit Manager responded that there was a 3 year cyclical program in place for key financial system audits, however the plan was flexible and therefore there was still provision for any issues arising during the year that were not included within the plan.

RESOLVED: That Members reviewed and commented upon the 2018/19 Draft Internal Audit Strategy, Plan and Charter.

8 AUDITED FINAL ACCOUNTS 2016/17 (Agenda Item 8)

Order of Items: The Chair announced that Item 8 would be discussed after Item 5 on the Agenda.

The Interim Assistant Director of Resources presented the report advising that Officers were working closely with external audit and had put a number of measures in place to achieve the earlier closing date including reviewing the closing timetable,

employing additional temporary staff and resolving issues with the finance IT system. The Interim Assistant Director of Resources noted that in light of this work the External Auditors had re-evaluated London Borough of Merton's risk profile for closing the accounts from red to amber.

The External Auditor advised that a new online portal had been implemented which was making the processes quicker and whilst there were still residual issues they were in the minor category. The amber category reflected that External Audit were more confident in the Councils' ability to meet the closing deadlines.

In response to member questions the External Auditor advised that the earlier closing date was from Central Government and therefore affected all Local Authorities.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the work undertaken by officers to prepare for the closure of the 2017/18 Statement of Accounts.

9 REVIEW OF POLLING PLACES (Agenda Item 9)

The Assistant Director for Corporate Governance presented the report advising that there had already been consultation with members on the contents and gave an overview of the recommendations and noting that details of alternative options were contained within the report.

Members welcomed that less Schools were being used as Polling Stations and requested that officers ensure that adequate signage and maps were used to notify voters of any changes to locations of polling stations in addition to information currently given on polling cards.

RESOLVED:

- A) That the Standards and General Purposes Committee recommended that the Council agrees that the Salvation Army Hall replaces Merton Hall as a polling place for polling district QC in Abbey Ward.
- B) That the Standards and General Purposes Committee recommended that the Council agrees that Merton Park Baptist Church replaces Joseph Hood Primary School as a polling place for polling district SA in Cannon Hill Ward.

10 APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSON (Agenda Item 10)

The Democratic Services Officer presented the report and gave an overview of the recommendations.

Members requested that the Independent Person completing his term be written to expressing the Committees' thanks for his work.

RESOLVED: That the Standards and General Purposes Committee agreed that an interview panel comprising one Councillor from each political group should be

appointed to interview and to recommend to Council the appointment of one Independent Person to serve for a period of three years.

11 UPDATE ON RIPA AUTHORISATIONS (Agenda Item 11)

The Assistant Director for Corporate Governance presented the report, advising that whilst there had been zero authorisations under RIPA in the last quarter, other methods were being used. The Assistant Director for Corporate Governance advised there had been 190 prosecutions this year for fly tipping and litter offences.

Members requested that regular updates be provided on prosecutions.

RESOLVED: That members noted the purposes for which investigations have been authorised under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000.

12 COMPLAINTS AGAINST MEMBERS (Agenda Item 12)

The Committee received a verbal update from the Assistant Director of Corporate Governance, who advised that there were currently no complaints being considered in any format against any Merton Councillors.

13 TEMPORARY AND CONTRACT STAFF UPDATE (Agenda Item 13)

RESOLVED: That the public were excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 2 Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

The HR Lead presented the report, advising that the use of Temporary and Contract staff still continued to be closely monitored and this would remain a regular report to Committee.

Members discussed the report in depth; asked questions regarding hard to fill positions and expressed the importance of growing and developing current staff and methods in place to retain them.

RESOLVED: That progress made to monitor and control the use of Temporary workers and Consultants was noted.

14 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 14)

The Work Programme was noted and agreed.