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General Purposes & Audit Committee

Meeting of held on Thursday, 16 September 2021 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Karen Jewitt (Chair);
Councillor Stephen Mann (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Joy Prince, Andrew Pelling (In place of Paul Scott),
Jason Cummings (In place of Luke Clancy) and Jeet Bains (In place of Simon Hoar)

Apologies: Councillors Chris Clark, Luke Clancy, Simon Hoar and Joy Prince

PART A

8/21 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 24 February 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

9/21 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

10/21 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

11/21 **Update Report on the Recruitment of the Independent Chair of GPAC**

The Committee received a report presenting an update on the recruitment and appointment of the independent Chair for the Committee.

Heather Wills, Governance Improvement Advisor Introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by Members:

a) Process: Following a question from a Member, the Officer noted that following an extensive search process, there were 4 shortlisted candidates, for which interviews were scheduled to start the week following the Committee. It was up to the Committee to decide whether it wanted just the Independent Chair or to have the Independent Chair plus one Independent

Member. The proposed revisions to the Constitution to enable the appointment of the Independent Chair would reflect Members' views on whether to have an Independent Member in addition to the Independent Chair of the Committee

b) Independent Members: Members highlighted concerns over the attendance of previously appointed Independent Members and noted that Officers had spent a considerable amount of time chasing the status of their attendance prior to meetings

c) Finance: Members asked a question around the total costing of Starfish recruitment agency. The Interim Executive Director of Resources agreed to confirm the exact figure and share it with the Committee following the meeting

d) Previously-Appointed Independent Chair: Members highlighted the previously-appointed Independent Chair and spoke about the possibility of them being contacted about them returning to post. The Chair also raised the potential benefit of looking at how other local authorities had dealt with remuneration of Independent Members.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

1. Noted the contents of this report
2. Agreed to recommend to Full Council the approach to arrangements for the two current non-voting members of GPAC:
 - Option B: To retain one independent co-opted member alongside the independent Chair, with effect from a decision of Full Council to implement the new arrangements.
3. Endorsed the proposed changes to the Constitution set out in section 4.

12/21

Croydon Finance Review - Phase 1, 2 and 3 Reports - Update on Implementation

The Committee received a report providing an update on actions taken in continuing to implement recommendations relating to the Council's recent Finance Review.

Matt Davis, Interim Director of Finance introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by Members:

a) Previous 'Red' Rating: Members raised concerns over the omission of the 'red' rating. The Officer explained that red was understood to suggest an inability to be achieved. The targets previously listed as red and now moved to amber or green were intended to be achieved

b) Legal Advice: Members asked a question around the total costs spent on legal advice, and whether the figure may be decreased. The Officer explained that there was a Daily Spend Control Panel whereby all requests for external legal advice was challenged. This process had rejected some spends where it was considered inappropriate or would have been best provided in house. The Officer agreed to calculate the total spend and provide it to Committee.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

1. Noted the latest position and progress in implementing the recommendations of the Croydon Finance Review as set out in the body and appendices to the report.

13/21 **Report in the Public Interest Action Plan - Progress Update**

The Committee received a report providing the Quarter 2 update of progress made responding to the Council's Report in the Public Interest.

Asmat Hussain, Interim Executive Director of Resources and Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by Members:

- a) **Recommendation 24:** Members noted recommendation 24 of the report which showed a quarterly review, and questioned how this Item would come to its close. The Officer explained that one the action was listed as complete Audit would carry out further assurance to ensure the actions were accomplished. A final report would then be taken to Full Council with a note that all of the RIPI recommendations had been completed, before the Item came to a complete finish
- b) **CareCubed Tool:** Following a question from a Member, the Officer explained that a series of training around the CareCubed tool had been scheduled and completed. An analysis would be completed by September 2020 to see the results of the tool and to conclude whether it was worth continuing with
- c) **Lessons Learned Paper:** Members raised a question around the progression of the Lessons Learned paper. The Officer noted that it had not yet been completed as it was pending the outcome of the Croydon Park Hotel Audit. Members requested for an update to be provided at each meeting of the Committee acknowledging its progress, with a potential completion date by the November Committee
- d) **Clarification:** Members requested further clarification on Recommendation 7b and 13b and Recommendation 3

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

- 1.1 Noted and agreed on the progress the Council had made in regard to achieving the recommendations set out by external auditor in the Report in the Public Interest (appendix 1) with 62 out of 99 actions complete;
- 1.2 Noted the outcome of the first tranche of work to properly evidence what had been achieved so far following the initial internal audit of actions delivered to provide full assurance to members and residents on the changes achieved;

1.3 Agreed the Refreshed Action Plan including actions marked complete, progress updates against open actions and identification of actions to be embedded going forward as business as usual;

1.4 Agreed that the Q.2 Report was to go to Full Council on December 13th 2021 in order that progress on the action plan be properly noted by all members.

14/21 **Production of Formal Minutes for Council and Committee Meetings**

Asmat Hussain, Interim Executive Director of Resources and Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by Members:

a) Grant Thornton: Members raised concerns around the reports published by Grant Thornton, which included statements around what Councillors had or had not done in meetings. Their evidence had come only from the meetings' Minutes, which were not Ver Batum, and therefore there were a lot of inaccuracies. It was noted that the Council streamed all of its meetings online and that a recording was available on the web

b) Transcripts: Members highlighted a number of other providers which offered live transcripts. The Officer agreed to speak with the Digital team as to whether this would be possible within the Teams software, and whether there was any cost attached

c) The Chair suggested that either the January or February Committee meeting should include a report on what can be done to better the system already in place and to include the costs and length of contract already in place and details around any break out clause.

The Chair proposed a recommendation to read:

1.3) To take on board the recommendations and suggestions made by Committee this evening which will be Minuted.

This was seconded by Councillor Chris Clarke and agreed unanimously.

1.1) Noted the updated guidance from the Council's external auditor, Grant Thornton, in relation to the production of formal minutes of Council and Committee meetings as detailed in paragraph 4 of the report,

1.2) Noted the guide to minute writing standards in Croydon detailed in Appendix 1 of the report; and

1.3) Agreed the recommendations and suggestions made by Committee this evening which have been Minuted.

15/21 **Internal Audit Update Report**

The Committee received a report providing an update on the Council's Internal Audit Report findings.

Dave Phillips, Head of Internal Audit introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by Members:

- a) **ELT Update:** Following a question from a Member, the Interim Corporate Director of Resources and s151 Officer stated that they were happy to share reports on improvement to the Committee and noted that openness and transparency were important
- b) **Invoices:** Members raised concerns over invoices. The Officer explained that in some cases, supplier had erroneously issued the Council duplicate invoices. In other cases, there had been disputes with contractors invoicing the Council where the service had not been delivered.
- c) **Next Committee:** Members requested for this Item to return to the next meeting of the Committee and for the relevant Cabinet Member and Director to attend to answer any questions from Members.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

- 1.1 Agreed to note the Internal Audit Report to 31 July 2021 (Appendix 1 of the report).

16/21 **Anti-Fraud Update Report**

The Committee received a report presenting the findings of the Council's recent Anti-Fraud activity.

David Hogan, Head of Anti Fraud introduced the report.

The Committee gave its thanks to David Hogan, Head of Anti Fraud for his work during his time at the Council, and offered him its best wishes in his next venture.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

- 1.1. Agreed to note the Anti-Fraud activity of the Corporate Anti-Fraud team for the period 1 April 2021 – 31 July 2021.

17/21 **Work Programme**

Asmat Hussain, Interim Executive Director of Resources and Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report.

Members requested for:

- The Brick by Brick report to be presented to Committee

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- Items on the Work Programme for previous meetings to be updated regularly to ensure continuity between itself and what has been presented to Committee.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

1. Agreed the Work Programme 2021/22

The meeting ended at 9.25 pm

Signed:

Date: