

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE 15 FEBRUARY 2022

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD ON
TUESDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2022 AT 1400 HOURS IN COMMITTEE
ROOM C, COUNCIL HOUSE EXTENSION, 6 MARGARET ST,
BIRMINGHAM**

PRESENT:-

Councillor Grindrod in the Chair;

Councillors Bore, Bridle, Merion Jenkins, Hendrina Quinnen, Morrall and Tilsley

NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

- 419 The Chair advised and the meeting noted that this meeting would be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's You Tube site (www.youtube.com/channel/UCT2kT7ZRPFCXq6_5dnVnYlw) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there are confidential or exempt items.

The business of the meeting and all discussions in relation to individual reports was available for public inspection via the web-stream.

APOLOGIES

- 420 No apologies were submitted.
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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 421 Members were reminded that they must declare all relevant pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests relating to any items of business to be discussed at this meeting. If a pecuniary interest was declared a Member must not speak or take part in that agenda item. Any declarations would be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Satinder Sahota, City Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, reminded Members of the purdah pre-election guidance for meetings held during purdah.

EXEMPT INFORMATION – POSSIBLE EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Councillor Tilsley requested consideration of an item suitable for the private agenda related to the audit of a supplier with debts that had been under estimated at £40 million.

422

RESOLVED

That in accordance with Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to information) (Variation order) 2006, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of those parts of the agenda designated as exempt on the grounds that it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the press and public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information.

MINUTES – AUDIT COMMITTEE – 29 NOVEMBER 2021 AND MATTERS ARISING

423

The minutes of the last meeting of 29 November, having been previously circulated were confirmed and signed by the Chair. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January, 2022 will be available for the next meeting.

Councillor Marje Bridle stated that she had previously requested information from the Auditor on providing Value for Money but she had not received it

ASSURANCE SESSION - CABINET MEMBER VULNERABLE CHILDREN'S AND FAMILIES PORTFOLIO

The Cabinet Member Vulnerable Children's and Families Portfolio attended the meeting accompanied by Gary Messenger also joined online by Sue Harrison and Sarah Dunlavey. An in-depth presentation was given with the use of slides. Following the discussion that ensued and in response to questions from Members the following points were made:-

- In reply to a question Sue Harrison explained the service performance figures and what the red colour indicated.
- A report back will be made on the Gateway review in the near future.
- If there were additional questions on homelessness there could be a further report back to the Committee in the future.
- With regard to SEND it was noted that there seemed to be problems out of term time. In reply to the ability to provide adequate school education for children Councillor Thompson informed that a lot of work had been

undertaken with schools and Sue Harrison advised that they worked closely with the regional school's commissioner responsible for academies.

- The Local Authority ensured there were sufficient school places. They talked to schools about the inclusion agenda and the opportunity for a resource provision within schools as the birth rates had grown in some areas of the City and fallen in others. They were working in partnership on a strategy to look at how this was managed. This could be discussed further with the relevant Cabinet Member.
- They were looking into the underperformance and capacity of the call centre system. They received up to 600 calls a day about NEETs, There was also the impact from covid, sickness and driver ability issues. .
- One of their priorities was to make the service better for children and families. Their rating had now moved to fair.
- With regard to expenditure on consultants and Interim staff, whilst in a period of transformation the value of having interim staff had been recognised however it was not a permanent solution. Homeworking was difficult when trying to build a new Team. They were recruiting staff and some staff could convert to permanent staff. They planned to build a structure from the end of March and ensure they had good quality staff with the right people filling the posts.
- With regard to safeguarding, staff received training opportunities and briefings together with a lot of information. An event was planned to train staff to deal with sexual exploitation. They also needed to take into consideration the needs of staff and ensure they were safe and well.

424

RESOLVED:-

That the presentation and discussion be noted.

ASSURANCE SESSION - CABINET MEMBER HOMES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS PORTFOLIO

The Cabinet Member, Homes and Neighbourhoods Portfolio attended the meeting accompanied by Julie Griffin. Chis Jordan and Sajeela Nasser were also available online to respond to questions. A presentation was given with the use of slides. Following the discussion that ensued and in response to questions from Members the following points were made:-

- Turnaround of Voids were below target however there had been a significant amount of improvement.

- With regard to problems with housing options and repairs, Members were reassured that the issues raised would be taken away and looked at. Complaints were closely monitored and spot checks were carried out, however a common thread was the quality of the work.
- With regard to contractors and the setting of targets it was reported that negotiations were being held for 2022 to 2024 and additional resources had been available to ensure the best value for money was secured.
- The current arrangements for engagement related to housing vulnerable people in the City was good.
- Sajeela Nasser advised that there was a mandatory licensing scheme for HMO's whereby Birmingham City Council set conditions on landlords. There were issues with regard to specific properties and they looked at every case related to HMO's and Exempt Accommodation.
- A review on housing was due at the Housing Scrutiny Committee in the next few days.
- In reply to Members they were aware of the issues with HMO's. They investigated all the cases and checked that landlords were within the conditions of their licence.
- A report on the Selective Licensing Scheme was due to Cabinet in March.
- In response to the issue of Silo working across the Council, a key recommendation from the review was to have improvement plans working with key Directorates to ensure joined up working. The standard of voids compared to other Local Authorities was being looked at.
- Julie Griffin undertook to look into the information on inspections being available for local Councillors to enable them to deal with issues in their Ward.

425

RESOLVED:-

That the presentation and discussion be noted.

EXTERNAL AUDITORS PROGRESS REPORT

Jon Roberts and Laurelin Griffiths of Grant Thornton, External Auditors, gave an update informing the Committee that the Audit was progressing in a planned way and on target for the March Audit Committee meeting. The completion of the Audit was the number one priority. They were working hard with officers to

avoid unjustified delays. In response to the Chair's comment about new ways of working, this would ensure continuous improvement for future years.

Councillor Marje Bridle had not received the approved outline of the approach taken for Value to Money as she had requested and asked that it be sent to her direct.

426

RESOLVED:-

That the progress report be noted.

PROCUREMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDIT - 2023 - 2028

The following report of the External Auditors was submitted: -

(See document No. 1)

Rebecca Hellard, Mohammed Sajid and Sara Pitt were present for this report. The report was presented informing the Audit Committee of the Council's decision regarding the procurement route for appointing an external auditor for the five financial years 2023/24 to 2027/28. There had been 3 options that were set out in the report together with the implications of each option. It had been recommended that the PSAA route be followed. They were happy to attend a meeting with officers to enable them to gain a better understanding of the route taken.

427

RESOLVED:-

That the Council's motion to opt-into the sector-led option for the appointment of external auditors be noted.

SCHEDULE OF OUTSTANDING MINUTES

The following Schedule of Outstanding Minutes was submitted:-

(See document No. 2)

The Chairman undertook to work with officers to update the Schedule of Outstanding Minutes for the next meeting. .

Councillor Bore expressed concerns about minute 334 the restructure of the street scene service area. He had not received a response from the Director of City Operations to his issue raised on 29 June 2021. The Chair undertook to follow up the issue.

During the discussion on the Ombudsman report Councillor Marje Bridle had asked that the CEO attend a meeting to discuss the issue of silo working. The Chair said that he had not forgotten and would follow it up.

Councillor Bore stated that at the end of the last meeting at the end of the discussion he asked Darren Share to confirm who was responsible for moving back the bins after collection. He had today received an email informing him that the issue was being discussed with the Unions.

The Chair undertook to send a letter to the Chief Executive regarding the issue.

428 **RESOLVED:-**

That the Schedule of Outstanding minutes be noted.

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

429 The next meeting is scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 29 March, 2022 at 1400 hours in the BMI, Margaret Street.

OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

430 The Chair undertook to follow up all the matters raised. There was no other urgent business.

AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

431 **RESOLVED:-**

That in an urgent situation between meetings the Chair, jointly with the relevant Chief Officer, has authority to act on behalf of the Committee.

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

432 **RESOLVED:-**

That, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, which includes exempt information of the category indicated, the public be now excluded from the meeting:-

Exempt Paragraph 3