

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY, 20TH OCTOBER, 2022

**MEMBERS:** Councillors Mahym Bedekova (Chair), Ayten Guzel (Vice Chair), Nawshad Ali, Alessandro Georgiou, Suna Hurman, Joanne Laban, Elisa Morreale, Sabri Ozaydin, Paul Pratt and Peter Nwosu (Independent Person)

**Officers:** Fay Hammond (Executive Director – Resources), James Newman (Director of Finance - Corporate), Terry Osborne (Director of Law and Governance - Chief Executive Department), Gemma Young (Head of Internal Audit and Risk Management - Chief Exec Legal Services), Eleanor Brown (Head of Transformation - Resources), Sarah Fryer (Head of Schools Personnel Service – Chief Executive Department), Annette Trigg (Chief Accountant – Resources), Will Wraxall (Shareholder and Commercial Partnerships Manager - Resources), Joseph Keane (National Management Trainee - Chief Executive Department), (Marie Lowe (Governance and Scrutiny Officer - Chief Executive Department)

**Also Attending:** Lisa Blake ((Partner/Head of Public Sector Assurance) BDO External Auditors) and David Eagles ((Partner) BDO External Auditors)

### 1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly representatives from the Council's External Auditors, BDO, Lisa Blake (Partner / Head of Public Sector Assurance) and David Eagles (Partner).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Michael Rye, who was substituted by Councillor Paul Pratt and Councillor Esin Gunes, who was substituted by Councillor Suna Hurman.

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

### 3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 JUNE 2022 AND 26 JULY 2022

**AGREED** the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meetings held on 29 June 2022 and 26 July 2022.

### 4. AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION - STAFF FORUM / JOINT CONSULTATIVE GROUP FOR TEACHERS (JCGT)

The report was presented by Eleanor Brown, Head of Transformation. The report the proposed changes to the arrangements for consultation meetings between School Professional Associations, elected members, senior officers, and others.

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Members expressed the view that, whilst it was important that the consultative meetings had representation from unions, there should also be a significant presence of Head Teachers, teachers and other school staff who should be provided with an opportunity to attend to put forward their views, and those of their colleagues. It was in everyone's interest that a balanced view be put rather than an over representation of one group of individuals.

**AGREED** that:

1. A Members and Professional Associations Schools Group to facilitate discussion and consultation between elected members, senior officers and school professional associations on issues related to the school's workforce be established together with the consequential abolition of the Staff Forum be agreed;
2. Consideration be given to wider representation of school staff on the proposed consultative body be agreed;
3. The School Workforce Consultation Group (SWCG) would continue to meet termly and that the half-termly meetings with Enfield Schools' Personnel Service would also continue, as required be noted; and
4. The consequential constitutional changes be recommended to Full Council for approval.

### **5. ENFIELD COUNCIL CORPORATE COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22**

The report was introduced by Eleanor Brown, Head of Transformation. The report summarised the findings of the review of corporate complaints during 2021-22 and focused on the nature of complaints and the learning they provided to improve services in the future. The report also provided an overview of Member Enquires (MEQ) which had been requested by the Committee in May 2022.

Officers advised that the case management systems for complaints, subject access requests (SARs) and Member enquiries were still being improved to improve user experience and to improve the way we submit and the extract information for action and analysis.

Members considered a response time of six weeks to respond to MEQs to be unacceptable. Officers acknowledged that there had been a delay in providing responses to some MEQs and that this was due in part to some staff in departments not fully understanding the system and how to process the MEQs.

The introduction of the new MEQ case management system, resource structure and handling policy during 2022/23 were designed to improve response performance and quality of those responses to Members and consequently to residents. Where skills, knowledge gaps or poor

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understanding of the use of the system had been identified training had been provided and would continue to be provided.

The Executive Director – Resources confirmed that the information relating to complaints was seen by the Chief Executive, Executive Directors and Directors and that work is on-going to address and understand the reasons behind the high volumes of service requests and particular issues, such as missed bins. Should a MEQ be closed prematurely, or the service request not be dealt with satisfactorily, members were asked to send the case to the Executive Director/Director. Whilst Officers were continually striving to improve service areas and the target was to respond to 95% of MEQs within 8 days, it was acknowledged that an 80% response rate was unsatisfactory.

Members commented that the MEQ training and working group had been very useful, and the involvement of additional members would be welcomed.

Officers, in response to a question from a member regarding whether there had been a reduction in the submission of MEQs through the new system compared to the previous methods, undertook to provide the information. Generally, there were fluctuations over the year in each quarter.

**AGREED** that the findings and improvement actions included in the Corporate Complaints Annual Report be noted and a further update report be brought to the meeting of the General Purposes Committee on 16 March 2023.

### **6. AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT SERVICE PROGRESS UPDATE**

The report was introduced by Gemma Young (Head of Internal Audit and Risk Management). The report summarised the results of the work undertaken during the period 1 April 2021 to 31 August 2022 and the continued work to target limited audit resources at the highest priority Corporate and Schools' services.

Members noted with concern the improvements and actions taken regarding the results of the completed audit in relation to CR09 – Cross Cutting – Corporate Health and Safety Board which had a limited assurance level. However, members were reassured that the Corporate Health and Safety Board now reports into the Assurance Board, chaired by the Chief Executive.

Officers advised Members, who had also expressed concerns regarding the continued delays regarding the Community Infrastructure Levy referred to in Appendix B: Overdue High-Risk Actions, that the Assurance Board were actively discussing and progressing this particular audit to ensure the actions were completed expeditiously.

**AGREED** that the work completed by the Audit and Risk Management Service during the period 1 April 2021 to 31 August 2022 and the key themes and outcomes arising from this work be noted.

### **7. CORPORATE RISK REGISTER UPDATE**

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The report was introduced by Gemma Young (Head of Internal Audit and Risk Management). The report presented a summary of risks and the latest Corporate Risk Register (CRR).

In response to a query from members regarding the risk score for the corporate risk - CR06 (Customer Demand) which had been increased from 12 to 16, members queried that given the current social and economic situation the expectation was that there would be increased challenges for the Council with a resulting increase to risk. Officers undertook to check all scores to eliminate any transposition errors.

The Executive Director – Resources, referring to CR20 - Financial Management, stated that once the external auditor BDO had carried out and completed their work in relation to the additional queries they had raised, the audit of the accounts could be progressed.

**AGREED** that the Corporate Risk Register presented at Appendix A of the Officers report be noted.

### 8. **UPDATE ON THE AUDIT OF THE 2019/20, 2020/21 AND 2021/22 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS AND PENSION FUND**

Members of the Committee welcomed the representatives of the Council's External Auditors, BDO, Lisa Blake and David Eagles, who had attended the meeting together with officers, to provide an update on the unaudited accounts for the three financial years 2019/20, 2020/21, and 2021/22.

Officers provided an update on the audit status for each year of open unaudited accounts for the three financial years 2019/20, 2020/21, and 2021/22 (including Pension Fund) together with a position statement with regards to the situation with the Council's external auditor, BDO.

At the invitation of the Chair and for the benefit of the committee, the BDO representatives gave additional context to the previous two and a half years, summarised the current position and explained their plan to ensure that the unaudited accounts were signed off.

The Committee noted the reasons why the accounts for the last three years had not been signed-off and the events leading up to the current position.

Members of the committee expressed their dissatisfaction with the overall performance of BDO, which was considered to be totally unacceptable, and BDO's inability to progress sign-off of the accounts as stipulated in the current contract. Members insisted that BDO provide a clear timetable and end-date as to when the accounts would be signed off, barring the sector-wide infrastructure assets issue which had been fully explained to the committee in reports at previous meetings. Members noted that it was hoped the

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infrastructure issue would be concluded before the end of the 2022 calendar year or very early in the new year.

Members were deeply concerned regarding the reputational risks to the Council. Members could not understand why there was a further delay when BDO had indicated that they hoped that an audited set of accounts, infrastructure assets aside, would be brought to the committee meeting. Members also expressed their dissatisfaction with the contractual arrangements with the Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA), which allowed for continual shift and prevented the sign-off of the accounts.

Officers reported that all the information necessary for the audit to continue through the due process had been supplied to BDO and Council staff were on standby and ready to respond to any further requests for information from BDO. It appeared to members that there were problems being experienced by BDO in providing sufficient resource to continue with the audit and that BDO appeared to prioritise audits for other organisations, namely the NHS, over and above Enfield.

The representatives from BDO explained that it had been very difficult to reschedule the work due to the resources available, although some additional resource had been supplied by BDO. The representative also confirmed that BDO would not be paid until the audits were complete. The Audit Partner, David Eagles, responsible for the 2019/20 audit, explained that he was booked in on 1 November 2022 to work on Enfield's 2019/20 audit, and hoped that 2019/20 accounts audit would be finalised, infrastructure assets aside, for the next GPC meeting on 1 December 2022. Lisa Blake, responsible for 2020/21 accounts, explained that she had a team booked to re-commence audit of the 2020/21 accounts from November, but that this was dependent on the 2019/20 audit being finalised.

Members requested that the representatives attend every meeting, either in person or, virtually, should personal attendance not be possible for any reason, until at the accounts for which BDO are signed-off.

Officers advised that going forward there would be a more robust contract in place than that which was in place with BDO.

**AGREED** that:

1. The information provided within the report of Officers on the status on progress of audit of London Borough of Enfield's open sets of accounts for the since the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held in June 2022, together with the 2021/22 draft accounts now published, be noted;
2. The current accumulated backlog of three financial years 2019/20, 2020/21, and 2021/22 of unaudited statement of accounts be noted;

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3. It be noted that, the audit of the 2019/20 statement of accounts, barring the sector-wide infrastructure assets issue, had not been finalised as expected, but that BDO hoped to have the audit finalised (infrastructure assets aside) for the next GPC meeting on 1 December 2022; and
4. Representatives of the Council's external auditor, BDO should attend every subsequent meeting, either in person or virtually, until all the audited accounts for the three financial years 2019/20, 2020/21, and 2021/22 of unaudited statement of accounts had been signed off.

### **9. REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000 (RIPA) UPDATE**

As a result of the guillotine being applied, there was no discussion on this item.

**AGREED** that:

1. The Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) between 10 March 2021 and 9 September 2022 be noted; and
2. A review of the Council's use of Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) powers be reported every three years.

### **10. GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23**

**AGREED** that the work programme of the General Purposes Committee be noted.

### **11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**NOTED** the next meeting of the General Purposes Committee was scheduled to take place at 7pm on Thursday, 1 December 2022 at the Civic Centre.

The meeting ended at 10.35 pm.