

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Governance Committee

Tuesday, 21 June 2022 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

P K Lamb (Chair)

J Bounds (Vice-Chair)

R D Burrett, D Crow, M G Jones, G S Jhans, Y Khan, R A Lanzer, T Lunnon, K McCarthy and S Pritchard

Officers Present:

Siraj Choudhury Head of Governance, People & Performance

Mez Matthews Democratic Services Officer

1. Disclosures of Interest

No disclosures of interests were made.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Governance Committee held on 21 March 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Public Question Time

No questions were asked by the public.

4. Annual Governance Statement 2021-2022

The Committee considered report [LDS/183](#) of the Head of Governance, People and Performance which requested that the Committee provide any comments on the Annual Governance Statement ("the Statement") and Governance Action Plan ("the Plan") for incorporation into the final versions which would be considered at a future meeting of the Audit Committee. It was brought to the Committee's attention that the Statement for 2021/22 concluded that there were no significant governance issues to report.

During its consideration of both the Statement and the Plan the Committee raised several comments and queries. In response to those matters the Committee was provided with the following information:

- Given the retirement of the Audit and Risk Manager, the independent opinion on the overall adequacy of the effectiveness of the Council's governance, risk and control framework for 2021/22 had been provided by the Head of Legal,

Governance and HR (now retitled the Head of Governance, People & Performance).

- Due to a new Leader of the Council recently being elected, it was likely that the current (rather than the previous) Leader would sign the Statement for 2021/22.
- Although succession planning was in place within the Council, it was likely that the pandemic had led Audit staff to evaluate their retirement plans earlier than expected which had resulted in members of the Audit team retiring within a shorter timeframe than envisaged.
- The Corporate Management Team regularly considered data and trends regarding complaints. The Head of Governance, People & Performance agreed to look into whether key information regarding the nature and level of complaints could be shared with others (beyond the Leader and relevant Cabinet Member) e.g. Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Cabinet Member.
- Strategic Risk for 2021/22 had been recorded in narrative format however, future risks would be given a 1-5 score. This approach mirrored common practice in terms of risk monitoring.

The Committee expressed its support for both the Statement and the Plan and, in particular, it was pleased that the format and wording of the Statement had been improved from that of previous years. With regard to the Crawley Homes rent issue (an example used to demonstrate Principle 7 Accountability), the Committee expressed the view that the Council had dealt with the issue in an open, transparent and effective manner.

RESOLVED

That the comments made by the Committee be taken into consideration, and that the final versions of the Annual Governance Statement and Governance Action Plan be put before a future meeting of the Audit Committee for its endorsement.

5. Review of Public Written Questions at the Full Council and Public Question Time at Committees

When the “New” Constitution was considered by the Governance Committee and the Full Council in early 2020 it was agreed that the introduction of a provision for public written questions at Full Council and the provision for Public Question Time at Audit Committee, Governance Committee and Licensing Committee be trialled for one year with an evaluation report being submitted to a Governance Committee in 2021. However, when the Covid-19 pandemic hit in 2020 all formal meetings of the Council were held virtually and the Governance Committee therefore subsequently agreed that the trial period be extended by a year.

The Committee considered the details relating to the use of the provisions since their introduction which were set out in report [LDS/182](#) of the Head of Governance, People & Performance. The Committee was of the view that, as the provision for public written questions at Full Council had only been used once and no questions had been asked during Public Question Time at Audit Committee, Governance Committee and Licensing Committee, the provisions had not been abused and therefore no change to those provisions should be made.

Several Committee members commented that they were unsure how aware the public was about the provisions available to them regarding public involvement in formal meetings of the Council.

RESOLVED

That no change to the current provisions for public written questions at the Full Council or Public Question Time at the Audit Committee, Governance Committee and Licensing Committee be made.

6. Extension to the Current Councillors' Allowance Scheme

Historically the effective dates of the Councillors' Allowances Scheme ran from 1 April to 31 March. Officers considered that it would be more efficient and easier to manage if the Scheme were instead aligned with the Council's municipal year.

Following discussion with the members of the Independent Remuneration Panel the Committee was requested to consider extending the current Scheme (due to end on 31 March 2023) so it ceased on the day of the next Annual Meeting of the Full Council (currently scheduled for 26 May 2023). The Committee noted that, at this stage, it was only being requested to consider an extension to the current Scheme and a report of the Independent Remuneration Panel would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Committee considered the proposal, with the majority of its members holding the view that aligning the Scheme with the Council's municipal year would be both more practical and efficient, as well as eliminating the possibility of Councillors having a conflict of interests when considering the level of allowance proposed by the Independent Remuneration Panel.

At the request of the Chair, it was noted that Councillor Lunnon abstained from voting on the matter.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Full Council be recommended to agree an extension the current Councillors' Allowances Scheme, so it ceases on the day of the next Annual Meeting of the Full Council (currently scheduled to take place on 26 May 2023).

7. Date of the Committee Meeting

An important Electoral Commission information session had been arranged for 12 September 2022. That date clashed with the next scheduled meeting of the Governance Committee. The Committee noted that the Committee Chairs for both the Governance Committee and Licensing Committee had therefore agreed to amend the dates of their next scheduled meetings as follows:

- Governance Committee moved from 12 September 2022 to 19 September 2022.
- Licensing Committee moved from 19 September 2022 to 12 September 2022.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Governance Committee concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.55 pm

P K Lamb (Chair)