

MINUTES OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

6 March 2024 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor C. Davidson (Chair)

Councillors H. Clark, J. Sosin, and M. Steel

Also in attendance –

Parish Councillors K. Bentley

Independent Person –
Mr P Jeremiah

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor D. Eley, Councillor P. Jackson, Mrs Gosling, Mr Lamb, and Mrs Mills.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 17th January 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

3. Declarations of Interest

All Members were reminded to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary interests or other registerable interests where appropriate in any items of business on the meeting's agenda. None were made.

4. Public Question Time

No questions or statements were received from members of the public.

5. Chair's Announcements

There were no announcements made.

6. Monitoring Officer Report

The Committee received an update on standards complaints since the May 2023 elections. It was noted that no new complaints have been received. However, since the publication of the agenda, one new complaint in relation to a parish-tier councillor had been received and in the process of facilitating a meeting with an Independent Person in due course. Members were advised of the allegations of the complaints including failure to register an interest.

In response to questions and statements from members, it was advised that;

- The details of the complaint cannot be released at this stage.
- The statistical information would be amended with the complaint received and this would be reflected when published on the Council website.

RESOLVED that the Committee;

- Noted the current statistical information as to complaints made, subject to the addition of the complaint received, and agreed for the report to be published on the Council's website.

(7.03pm to 7.06pm)

7. Annual Review of the Constitution

The Committee received an annual review of the Constitution. The Council's Monitoring Officer was required to keep the constitution updated and that one of the actions arising from the last Annual Governance Statement was to undertake its review. It was noted that parts of the constitution had been reviewed over the past few years.

Members were advised of the changes that have already been made and that minor amendments had been approved with consultation of the Chair of Governance Committee. There were no changes found that required approval from the Committee thus far but there were parts of the constitution that were identified for further review such as the Planning Code and Practice Notes. It was also advised that the contents of the Information Security Code of Conduct was also completed with the consultation of the Chair of Governance Committee.

RESOLVED that;

- The annual review of the Constitution was noted.

(7.06pm to 7.09pm)

8. Review of the Whistleblowing Policy

The Committee received an update in relation to the review of the Whistleblowing Policy. It was advised that the review would then align the Policy with the recent

updates to the Counter Fraud and Corruption Strategy and Fraud Response Plan. It was noted that whilst the Whistleblowing Policy was not in the constitution, it was accessible via the Council's website.

Members also heard that the other minor changes including updating organisation name, a job title, updating the links, removing gender references, and updating telephone contact number. It was noted that there were also updates in relation to the Financial Regulations and Practice notes. Members were also advised that there were also some work needed to realign the document as well as formatting edits.

In response to questions and statements from the Committee, it was advised that;

- Regarding grievance procedures and regarding bullying and harassment, it was advised that these were internal policies for employees and were not usually published with the Whistleblowing Policy. However, employees were also aware that these procedures were available via the Intranet.
- It was advised that around half a dozen whistleblowing incidents were received per year and these would be published in the Annual Whistleblowing Report in October 2024. It was also noted that most received were not whistleblowing incidents but that the form was used to make contact regarding complaints.
- The Whistleblowing Policy had never been in the Constitution and there was also no reference to it. However, having a Whistleblowing Policy would be a common practice in other local authorities.

RESOLVED that;

- The updates to the Whistleblowing Policy to be noted.

(7.09pm to 7.16pm)

9. Gifts and Hospitality Report

The Committee received a report in relation to the offers of gifts and hospitality made to councillors and officers. It was also noted that the Governance Committee assumed responsibility for these matters. It was advised that there were four declarations made by members and none from officers.

Members heard that there were several members and officers who were offered and accepted free tickets to Creamfields. It was advised that the offer was made available via the Council and treated as a generic event-based declaration in any event. It was noted that the two gifts and hospitality offered were below the threshold and the two were declined.

In response to the questions and comments from Committee members, it was advised that;

- In terms of offers from spam emails, it was advised that policy decision was for these not be treated as offers of gifts and hospitality. It was also advised that the

gifts or hospitality offered should be viewed as substantial to be declared which would be a question of judgement.

- There was a discussion regarding the wording of whether the offers of gift or hospitality should be declared as declined if ignored.

RESOLVED that;

- The gifts and hospitality report to be noted and published on the Council's website.

(7.16pm to 07.23pm)

10. Work Programme

The Committee received an update on the work programme for 2023-24. Members were informed that the June 2024 would also be the joint meeting with Audit & Risk Committee, with a Governance Committee meeting to follow afterwards.

It was also advised that planned constitutional items would be ready in time for the June 2024 Governance Committee meeting. The annual reports were also noted for the October 2024 meeting, and it was advised that there would be only one possible meeting between the January 2025 and the March 2025 meeting.

RESOLVED that the work programme of the Committee be noted.

(7.23pm to 7.25pm)

11. Urgent Business

There were no matters of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.25pm

Chair