

General Purposes & Audit Committee

Meeting of held on Thursday, 3 March 2022 at 6.30 pm in

MINUTES

Present: Dr Olu Olasode (Chair);
Councillor Karen Jewitt (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Nina Degrads, Clive Fraser, Lynne Hale, Ola Kolade,
Stuart Millson, Ian Parker, Joy Prince, Paul Scott and Kola Agboola (In place of
Chris Clark)

PART A

18/22 Minutes of Previous Meetings

The minutes of the meetings held on 16 February 2022 and 10 June 2021 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

19/22 Action Tracker for Minutes

The contents of the Action Tracker were noted.

20/22 Disclosure of Interests

There were none.

21/22 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no items of urgent business.

22/22 Council Budget 2022/23 - 2024/25

The Committee received a report detailing the Revenue and Capital Budgets for the General Fund for 2022/23 (setting out further growth and savings proposals to 2024/25), the proposed Council Tax charges for 2022/23, and the revenue and capital budgets for the Housing Revenue Account [HRA].

Matt Davis, Interim Director of Finance introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by the Committee:

- a) **Covid Grants:** Members raised concerns around the total received from grants for costs of Covid-related emergencies. The Officer explained that a monthly monitoring report was published, the latest of which projected a modest surplus on budget
- b) **Fair Funding Formula:** Following a question from a Member, the Officer noted that central Government had a new method of supporting Council's with their business rates, in the form of the Fair Funding Formula. When this was introduced, it changed how much each Council received compared to the old formula methodology. The Officer also noted that Croydon was not the only authority to have been issued a section 114 notice
- c) **Comparison to other local Boroughs:** Members highlighted concerns around the difference in funding between Croydon and other London Boroughs. The Officer explained that a number of variables were taken into consideration including resident population and net daily inflows. Central London typically had a higher number of commuters; due to which part of the grant reflected the number of services offered to non-residents.

23/22 **Fairfield Halls Report in the Public Interest Action Plan**

The Committee received a report providing an opportunity for Members to review the action plan developed in response to the recommendations made in the recent Report on the Public Interest.

John Jones, Monitoring Officer introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by the Committee:

- a) **Possibility of Fraud:** Members highlighted concerns around some of the wording in the report which could have been interpreted as suggesting actions had been fraudulent. The Officer explained that the emphasis was on abuse of position and not financial fraud.
- b) **Action Plan timeframe:** Following a question from a Member, the Officer confirmed that they intend for the initial assessment to have been completed by the end of the month
- c) **Compliance:** Members highlighted the importance of compliance in relation to the review of Council procurement. The Officer agreed to include a recommendation around compliance within the report.

RESOLVED that having considered and reviewed the Action Plan attached at Appendix 1B to the report, together with any proposed amendments or feedback that it wished to make on the Action Plan, as detailed in Minute c), this be submitted in a report to Cabinet for consideration at its meeting to be held on 21 March 2022.

24/22 **Changes to the Constitution**

At this point in the proceedings and in line with the Council's Constitution, the Vice-Chair Councillor Karen Jewitt took the Chair for the following General Purposes Items.

The Committee received a report asking it to recommend to the Council changes to the Constitution which were necessary for the implementation of the Mayoral Model of governance in Croydon following the May 2022 Local Elections.

John Jones, Monitoring Officer introduced the report.

RESOLVED that:

1. The changes to the Constitution, as detailed in Section 2 and set out more fully in Appendix 1 of the report, be approved and that:
 - (i) The following changes be implemented with immediate effect:
 - Section 4.22 (Emergency or Extreme Urgency) to Part 3 – Responsibility for Functions; and
 - Part 4I – Tender and Contract Regulations
 - (ii) All other changes be implemented with effect from 00.01 hours on the third day after the day of declaration of the results of the poll at the first election of the Mayor.

25/22 **Members' Scheme of Allowances**

The Committee received a report presenting the pan-London Independent Remuneration Panel; proposed amendments to the scheme of allowances; and proposals in relation to the provision of ICT equipment to Members.

John Jones, Monitoring Officer introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by the Committee:

- a) **Standardised equipment:** Members highlighted the benefits of standardised equipment. These included ability for parts replacement, software compatibility and being universal for all
- b) **Security:** Members raised concerns around personal data and its security on 'personal' hardware. It was concluded for standard Council equipment to be better equipped around data protection.

RESOLVED that having considered the options detailed in the report and made recommendations on an updated scheme of Members' Allowances to Full Council, informed by the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel and the proposal detailed in Appendix 2 to the report, together with the proposals to reintroduce directly provided ICT to members and the elected Mayor as described in Section 4 to the report, the Committee **RECOMMENDS** to full Council that:

1. The Monitoring Officer be authorised to comply with the necessary statutory publicity requirements in respect of the Independent

- Review Panel report 2022; the ongoing annual publicity of the Members' Scheme of Allowances which was required; and the approval of the advised Members' Allowance Scheme, following consideration of proposals recommended by the Committee;
2. The General Purposes and Audit Committee be authorised to agree an annual adjustment of allowances by reference to the annual Local Government Staff Pay Settlement where the only change made to the Scheme in any year was that effected by such annual adjustment, and;
 3. A further review of the Scheme be undertaken either following the May 2022 local elections, if required, or following the publication of the further review of the remuneration of councillors due to be undertaken by London Councils' Independent Remuneration Panel during 2022-23

26/22 **Anti-Fraud Update Report**

At this point in the proceedings, the role of Chair returned to the Independent Chair, Dr. Olu Olasode.

The Committee received a report detailing the Anti-fraud activity of the Corporate Anti-Fraud Team for the period 1 April 2021 – 31 December 2021 and the corresponding period 1 April 2020 – 31 December 2020.

Malcom Davies, Head of Insurance, Anti-Fraud and Risk introduced the report.

The following matter was raised by the Committee:

- a) **Backlog:** Members requested details as to how long it was likely to take to clear the current backlog of cases. The Officer agreed to come back to the next Committee with more detail on this matter.

RESOLVED that the Anti-Fraud activity of the Corporate Anti-Fraud Team for the period 1 April 2021 – 31 December 2021 and the corresponding period 1 April 2020 – 31 December 2020 be noted.

27/22 **Corporate Risk Register**

The Committee received a report that detailed the contents of the Corporate Risk Register as at March 2022.

Malcom Davies, Head of Insurance, Anti-Fraud and Risk introduced the report.

The following matter was raised by the Committee:

- a) **Deep Dive:** In response to the Officers request for a topic to deep dive, Members concluded Culture Change.

RESOLVED that the contents of the Corporate Risk Register, as at March 2022, be noted.

28/22 **Work Programme**

Sarah Keeble, Democratic Services and Governance Officer introduced the report.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme 2021/22 be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.09 pm

Signed:

Date:

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