

Performance and Administration Cabinet Committee

Wednesday, 20 September 2023

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Narinderjit Singh Thandi (Chair)
Cllr Gavin Larkins (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Rajinder Atwal
 David Beattie
 Dakota Dibben
 Leslie Hills
 Jo Hart
 Benjamin Sizer
 Alison Williams

Sarah Parfitt	Director (Corporate Services)
James Larkin	Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service
Pat Knight	Head of Revenues & Benefits
Karen Gingles	Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

1. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Christina Rolles. Cllr Alison Williams was her substitute.

2. To sign the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 23 March 2023 were signed by the Chair.

3. To declare any interest Members may have in the items contained on this agenda. When declaring an interest Members should state what their interest is.

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Overview of Performance & Administration Portfolio

The Committee were given an overview of the service areas included within the Performance & Administration portfolio. The Head of Revenues & Benefits informed Members the report was for information only explaining the service areas and current areas for concern.

Members were invited to ask question and make comment:

- Members queried whether the change of format, regarding the Corporate Plan, would mean changes would be encountered within the portfolio. The Director (Corporate

Services) advised that the Corporate Plan for 2023/27 would be considered at the next Cabinet meeting and would then be taken to full Council. Members were informed that the current performance management structure would remain the same, however new performance management measures would need to be developed and be used to see how the council performed against the key objectives within the new Corporate Plan. Measures would need to be reviewed to ensure that they continue to manage and monitor areas that were important to Gravesham and its residents.

The Committee noted the report.

5. Review of the Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service

Members were presented with the Annual review of the Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service. The purpose of this report was to provide Members of the Performance & Administration Committee with a copy of the annual review, that has been conducted in respect of the Internal Audit & Counter Fraud shared service with Medway Council.

The Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service advised that appendix 2 detailed the outcome of the review. He drew Members attention to the overview of the shared arrangement and highlighted that there had been an increase in the level of counter fraud resources in Medway. As Gravesham had not required these additional resources, the split between the two Councils had changed for Counter Fraud only, with 75% for Medway and 25% for Gravesham.

Members were advised there had also been a review of pay at Medway, resulting in salary increases within the shared service. Based on the contractual split, this meant an annual increased cost for Gravesham of £16,278. Members were informed that Gravesham had conducted a value for money assessment and concluded that the service continued to perform a good standard of service which was considered value for money.

The Chair invited the Committee to ask questions and make comment:

- Members commended the Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service and felt the service was cost effective. It was queried whether due to the cost of living crisis, if there had been an increase in fraudulent activity. The Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service acknowledged that with people struggling financially, there was an increased risk of fraud, however the department had not seen a significant spike in cases. It was noted that the value of fraud savings was on par with that of previous years.

The Committee noted the report.

6. Corporate Register of Partnerships and Shared Working Arrangements - P&A Committee

Members were presented with the Corporate Register of Partnership – July 2023. The purpose of this report was to inform Members of the Performance & Administration Committee of the Council's involvement in partnerships that are within the remit of the Committee.

The Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service highlighted that appendix 2 of the report outlined the services included within the register, which was provided on an annual basis. Members were advised that there was no proposal to change anything within the arrangement.

The Chair invited the Committee to ask questions and make comment:

- Members queried whether the register of partnerships and shared working arrangements had been scrutinised by the Finance and Audit Cabinet Committee. The Director (Corporate Services) informed the Committee that the document was updated annually and shared in its totality with Cabinet before the relevant parts being shared with the respective Cabinet Committees. Members were advised that this meeting was the opportunity to scrutinise and comment.

7. Information Governance Annual Report: 2022-2023

Members were presented with the Information Governance Annual Report: 2022-2023. The purpose of this report was to provide Members of the Performance & Administration Committee, (whose terms of reference included information governance) with an overview of the current arrangements within the Council to strategically manage information, including compliance with key standards.

The Director (Corporate Services) informed Members that the information governance infrastructure was in place to manage information, update policies, deal with the specifics of performance handling and freedom of information.

The Committee were updated on the Publication Scheme, which was a requirement for every local authority under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The scheme acted as a one stop shop for the public to understand the information the Council held. After a review in 2021, the revised Publication Scheme was now available on the Gravesham Borough Council website.

The Committee were advised that training was provided to both Members and officers on the risks of data handling. The Director (Corporate Services) noted that in the last year there had been no data incidents that met the threshold where they needed to be reported.

The Chair invited the Committee to ask questions and make comment:

- Members noted that the response time to subject access requests, stood at 76% within the 30 day deadline and wondered if the process was being tested to meet 100% going forward. The Director (Corporate Services) advised that over the last 6 months the process had been reviewed, establishing who dealt with the requests in each department, plus there was now a clear process on how the requests were to be handled. It was hoped that the activity undertaken to improve the process, would see an increase in responses going forward.
- The Committee highlighted that the report suggested there had been increased data incidents, compared to that of the previous year and wondered if the additional incidents were different in nature, to those of previous years. The Director

(Corporate Services) stated that there was an element of this, with new problems arising and some previous issues reoccurring. She emphasised that a lot of work had been conducted, to reinforce within the council workforce that data incidents should be reported; the council did not operate a blame culture and errors would be learnt from, ensuring they were not repeated. This message was being communicated throughout the Council by implementing changes in processes and training. The Director (Corporate Services) also noted the importance of being aware of external incidents to understand and test against Gravesham's processes, plus looking at where improvements could be made.

The Director (Corporate Services) informed Members that Gravesham's Information Governance Manager had spoken with a representative from the Information Commissioners Office recently regarding the Council's process for handing Freedom of Information requests. The representative had been satisfied with the council's arrangements and the only recommendation received was, that if responses were not provided after 20 days, a written reason should be recorded by the appropriate officer.

The Committee noted the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 7:48pm