

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **AUDIT AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE** held on **THURSDAY, 4TH APRIL, 2024** at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 2, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT

Councillors Sagal Abdi-Wali (Chair), Matt Cooper (Vice-Chair), Camron Aref-Adib, Richard Cotton, Samata Khatoon and Lorna Jane Russell and Fehintola Akinlose and Alan Layton (Independent Member)

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillors Nasim Ali, Judy Dixey and Nanouche Umeadi

ALSO PRESENT

Councillors Pat Callaghan and Nadia Shah

The minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting. They are subject to approval and signature at the next meeting of the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.

MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ali, Dixey and Umeadi and apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Khatoon.

2. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF STATUTORY DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS, COMPULSORY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND VOLUNTARY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS IN MATTERS ON THIS AGENDA

There were no declarations of interest.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY)

Broadcasting of the meeting

The Chair announced that the meeting was being broadcast live by the Council to the internet and could be viewed on the website for twelve months after the meeting. After that time, webcasts were archived and could be made available on request.

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Those who were seated in the meeting room or participating via Teams were deemed to be consenting to having their contributions recorded and broadcast and to the use of those sound recordings and images for webcasting and/or training purposes.

Order of Agenda

The Chair proposed, and it was agreed, that Items 9, 10 and 11 would be moved up the agenda to be considered as the first substantive items.

Breaking of fast

The Chair proposed, and it was agreed, that the meeting would adjourn between 7.30pm and 8pm to allow those who were observing Ramadan to break their fast.

4. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)

A deputation was heard from the Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association and the Camden Friends of Palestine relating to Item 9, the Principal Risk Update, in accordance with the deputation statement published on the supplementary agenda.

Members then asked questions of the deputees, and both the Chair and the Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities and Cohesion made some remarks. The Chair thanked the deputees for their attendance.

5. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES TO TAKE AS URGENT

There was no notification of urgent business.

6. MINUTES

The Committee Services Manager advised the Committee that Councillor Abdi-Wali was erroneously listed as having been absent from the 29th February 2024 and asked the Committee to agree an amendment to the minutes in order to correct the error.

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 24th February 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record subject to the amendment detailed above.

7. 2024-25 DRAFT INTERNAL AUDIT AND INVESTIGATIONS PLAN

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Director Corporate Services.

In relation to the IT audit plan, the Head of Internal Audit, Investigations and Risk Management indicated that the subject of the second review would be decided later in the year based on the risk assessment at the time, in order to ensure flexibility and a robust risk-based approach. On the recommendations that remained open from the cyber and data security audit, she advised that these were medium priority recommendations and they were being worked on. The Risk Manager confirmed that she was working with IT colleagues and undertaking informal risk reviews.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted and

- (i) The Internal Audit Strategy at Appendix A be approved;
- (ii) The 2024-25 Annual Internal Audit Plan at Appendix B be approved;
- (iii) The Principal Risk Assurance map at Appendix C be approved; and
- (iv) The 2024-25 Annual Investigations Plan at Appendix D be approved.

8. INTERNAL AUDIT FOLLOW UP UPDATE 2023-24

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Director Corporate Services.

In response to a question about the limited assurance on the Tenancy Management Organisations (TMOs) review, the Director of Housing remarked that there were some outstanding actions in relation to the Godwin and Crowndale TMO and that officers were working with them to iron out the issues, and were looking at increasing support to TMOs generally. That said, 72% of tenants thought that the Godwin and Crowndale TMO was an effective manager.

On voids, a Member commented that there had been a lot of work on improving the turnaround time over the last few years, but there were some recommendations yet to be implemented. The Director of Housing remarked that considerable work had been undertaken in recent years and a new voids procedure was being finalised which mapped out the whole process. There was now a dedicated voids team in place and turnaround time was coming down although there was more work to be done on this. There has also been a 90% increase in acceptances since the resumption of face-to-face viewings. In response to a further question, the Director confirmed that there was a plan in place to improve record keeping, as part of the new digital and data strategy for council systems, but this would take some time to come to fruition. In response to a question about medical assessments slowing

down the allocations process, she confirmed that considerable work had been done on this and efforts were ongoing to streamline the allocations process.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

9. PRINCIPAL RISK UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Director Corporate Services.

In relation to potential topics for future deep dives, a Member expressed the view that Improving Climate Resilience and Community Cohesion ought to be the next deep dives. Another Member expressed the view the increase in rough sleeping, and its impact on other services, should be the subject of a deep dive. Other suggestions for areas that merited a deep dive were Safeguarding Adults, in light of its wider impact on services such as the NHS, and the Cost of Living Crisis. Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED –

- (i) THAT the report be noted; and
- (ii) THAT risk deep dives be brought to the November 2024 meeting of the Committee on Safeguarding Adults and on the Cost of Living Crisis.

**ACTION BY: Executive Director Adults and Health/
 Executive Director Corporate Services/
 Executive Director Supporting Communities**

10. RISK DEEP DIVE - SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Director Children and Learning.

In response to questions, the Director of Children's Prevention, Family Help and Safeguarding commented that the assessment process was robust and the voices of children were important within this process. The service was moving towards a family help model, and away from a division between early years and children's social work, which would mean the services could share resources and this would go some way to mitigating the risk presented should the Supporting Families grant end. In response to a question regarding concerns elsewhere in the country about the relationship between children's social care services and the Police, the Director commented that the service had a very strong relationship with the Camden and Islington Police Service and a police officer was part of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and provided on-site support and liaison.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

11. RISK DEEP DIVE - PRESSURES IN THE HEALTH SYSTEM

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Director Adults and Health.

In response to questions about NHS waiting lists and how solutions were being tailored to the needs of specific groups, the Assistant Director of Public Health remarked that NHS care across the country operated locally, regionally and nationally and consequently could have long lead in times, with GPs having little ability to influence this. The NHS had a plan in place to deal with backlogs but the results were yet to be seen, and there was no easy answer. The Council could not directly influence the situation, but could work to mitigate the risks it presented to some extent. Intersectionality of need could compound the situation and there was a need to move towards a more holistic approach that considered how to manage multiple long-term conditions and their interactions. In response to questions about mental health support, the Assistant Director observed that where there was a diagnosis of a mental health condition, the primary care practitioner would liaise with mental health services, but the key to successful treatment was a good interaction at diagnosis stage.

In response to a question regarding whether a target score of 2 in relation to the risk presented by pressures in the health system was realistic, the Head of Adult Social Care Operations commented that it was impossible to assess the risk across the whole of the health system and so it was necessary to think strategically about what the potential risk might mean for the Council. Many of the levers were not within the Council's immediate control and so it might be sensible to revisit the target score.

The Head of Adult Social Care Operations confirmed that the workforce strategy due to be published within the next few weeks would include working with Good Work Camden to provide apprenticeships.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

12. EXTERNAL AUDIT COMPLETION LETTERS FOR 2019-20 AND 2020-21

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Director Corporate Services.

Suresh Patel and Rajesh Arora of Mazars, the Council's external auditor, advised that it was not yet clear when the results of the consultation on the backstop arrangements would be known or what a disclaimed audit opinion would look like. There had been a constructive conversation with the Council about lessons learned

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over the last two years and principles and expectations for the 2021/22 audit had now been agreed. Planning for this audit would be completed in April, work was expected to start in the last week of June, with field work completed by the end of August and the report submitted at the end of September. Whilst this was a challenging timetable, regular meetings were taking place to move things along and the situation would be reviewed at the end of April to assess whether enough progress had been made to achieve the September target.

The Director of Finance added that there had been a lot of focus on lessons learned and there was a commitment from both the Council and Mazars to improve the process. The Council's team had been strengthened and the process was being closely managed as a defined project with targets and escalation points.

In response to a question regarding how many authorities were likely to put in disclaimed 2022/23 accounts, Mr Patel remarked that his estimate was that at least half of authorities would not have fully audited accounts by the end of September. The Director of Finance remarked that even if this was the case for Camden's 2022/23 accounts, it was still his intention to bring them to the committee for scrutiny and to publish them on the Council's website.

A Member asked whether disclaimed 2022/23 accounts would present a problem with the 2023/24 accounts as the opening balances would not be able to be verified. Mr Patel confirmed that this would be the case but it was not yet clear what form a disclaimer would take and what the exact implications would be. It may mean that the 2023/24 accounts would be qualified due to the inability to verify the opening balances.

In relation to how the audits that Mazars had to undertake were prioritised, Mr Patel explained that Mazars had met with the section 151 officers of the seven London Boroughs that they were responsible for auditing and a timescale had been agreed. Should any of the boroughs not deliver what was required within their agreed timeframe, their audit would move to the end of the programme.

RESOLVED –

THAT the Annual Audit Letters from Mazars for the audits of the 2019/20 and 2020/21 financial years be noted.

13. ACCOUNTING POLICIES FOR THE STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2022/23 AND 2023/24

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Director Corporate Services.

In response to a question, the Director of Finance confirmed that changes to the accounting policy regarding depreciation of dwellings would have no impact on charges to residents.

RESOLVED –

- (i) THAT the Accounting Policies as set out in Appendix A of the report for each of the financial years 2022/23 and 2023/24 be approved; and
- (ii) THAT authority be delegated to the Executive Director Corporate Services, in consultation with the Chair of the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee, to approve any further amendments to the accounting policies that are found to be required during preparation of the accounts, noting that these will be reported to the Committee when the accounts are presented for approval.

14. MINOR CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES TO BE INCLUDED IN THE ANNUAL REPORT TO MAY COUNCIL

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Solicitor.

RESOLVED –

THAT the suggested changes to the Constitution detailed within the report, and the intention to include those changes in the annual report to Council in May, be noted.

15. WORK AND TRAINING PLAN AND ACTION TRACKER

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Solicitor.

Members were reminded that the session for the Committee to consider its effectiveness during the 2023/24 municipal year was taking place on 25th April 2024 at 6.30pm.

The Chair made reference to the recent resignation of Gio Spinella from the Council, and thanked him for his contribution during his time as a member of the Committee.

RESOLVED –

- (i) THAT the work plan for 2024/25 as set out at Appendix A be noted; and
- (ii) THAT the action tracker for actions arising from the previous meetings in 2023/24 as per Appendix C be noted.

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was no urgent business.

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Having adjourned between 7.33pm and 8.01pm, the meeting ended at 9.17 pm.

CHAIR

Contact Officer: Vicky Wemyss-Cooke

Telephone No: 020 7974 5726

E-Mail: vicky.wemyss-cooke@camden.gov.uk

MINUTES END