

## **THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN**

At a meeting of the **AUDIT AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE** held on **THURSDAY, 20TH FEBRUARY, 2025** at 7.00 pm in Committee Room 2, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

### **MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT**

Councillors Meric Apak (Chair), Matt Cooper (Vice-Chair), Steve Adams, Nasim Ali, Judy Dixey, Nazma Rahman and James Slater and Fehintola Akinlose and Alan Layton (Independent Member)

### **MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT**

Councillors Richard Cotton, Lorna Jane Russell and Nanouche Umeadi

**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 Cotton, Russell and Umeadi.

### **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.

### **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.

#### **4. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)**

The Chair informed members that a deputation had been received and accepted, a copy of the deputation statement was included in the supplementary agenda.

The deputation related to the Council's Scrutiny process and proposals to encourage more engagement with stakeholders. The deputation request had been made by Tom Young, while John Mason was in attendance to address the Committee.

John Mason addressed the Committee referring to the Housing Ombudsman report, commenting that over the last 4 years the Housing Scrutiny Committee had not questioned whether the Council's Housing repairs service had provided the Council and residents with value for money, suggesting the following 3 proposals to improve scrutiny in the Council:

- officers being required by the chair to respond to issues raised,
- providing written responses either from the chair or officers to the deputation and
- 20 minutes at each meeting to be available for the public to question elected members.

Invited to respond to the allegations made by the depute, the Borough Solicitor commented that in his deputation Mr Mason had referred on a number of occasions to deception by officers. He noted that having read the Housing Ombudsman's report he was not aware of any suggestions of deception by any Council officers in the report asking that this term should be used with caution and invited Mr Mason to write to him with any examples of deception by officers.

The following responses were given by the depute to members questions:

- With regards to officers not responding to deputations, at Housing Scrutiny Committee meetings on several occasions people had spent a considerable amount of time preparing their deputations and then not receiving a response from officers or Committee members.
- The whole process of reporting in the Council was flawed as it appeared that officers determined what a complaint was. There was no independent person looking at the complaint and the Council was not provided with a full picture of the issues.
- The deputation was brought to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee because the deputees were advised that it should go to this Committee which dealt with corporate governance issues rather than Housing Scrutiny.

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The Borough Solicitor advised that the remit of the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee included looking at changes to the Council's Constitution rather than specific issues relating to Housing Scrutiny noting that a report on the Ombudsman findings would be considered at the Housing Scrutiny Committee in the next week or so and that would be a more appropriate place for the issues raised to be considered where Housing officers and members could respond.

Members made the following comments:

- It was always good to look at how corporate governance in the Council could be improved, making full Council meetings stronger and improving scrutiny, however changes to the scrutiny process should be about policy and broader approaches to governance rather than individual cases or specific issues unless there was evidence of wider systemic issues.
- All the Council's scrutiny committees allowed members to comment on the approach the Council was taking on policy rather than scrutiny of individual officers.
- In their experience of sitting on Scrutiny Committees, deputations had always been responded to, either by officers or the committee.
- While there were some good suggestions in the deputation, and the Housing Scrutiny issue had been used as an example of why scrutiny in the Council should be re-examined, which was also being considered by other bodies such as the Democratic Review Group, some of the suggested proposals were impracticable. Such as having people hanging about after a 3-hour meeting to question members for 20 minutes.
- The Council recently had an extraordinary meeting where the Housing Ombudsman's report was thoroughly examined by members.

The Committee noted and thanked Mr Mason for his deputation.

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

There was no notification.

## **6. MINUTES**

### **RESOLVED –**

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

## **7. RISK DEEP-DIVE - ADULT SAFEGUARDING**

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

In response to questions Avril Mayhew, Director of Adult Social Care Operations made the following comments:

In terms of minimising the risk of continuity of care due to workforce changes, it was a common challenge which was not unique to Camden, workforce turnover in Camden was relatively low with the Council trying to maintain continuity of care which was not always possible. If there were any specific concerns these would be taken back to the team.

In terms of service provision to the LGBT community, as part of Adult Social Care's equality plan an LGBT framework had been developed where services paid particular attention and focused on these groups particularly as members of those groups became older and more reliant on kinship, with less access to family support. A link to the framework could be circulated to members.

### **ACTION BY: Director of Adult Social Care Operations**

The higher job vacancy rates in Camden compared to regional and national averages were due to a number of factors including Camden being an expensive place to live and travel to, however the Council's pay rates were comparable and Camden was committed to the London living wage. The Council's workforce strategy was targeted towards improving its retention strategy and making Camden a more attractive place to work with recruitment events planned in April this year.

The Council was more reliant on agency workers and had not been able to recruit to permanent vacancies as quickly as it would have liked.

Apart from comparable pay rates, other factors the Council felt would lead to successful retention included development opportunities for employing apprentices, ways of working, generous conditions and the favourable culture and values of the organisation commented on recently, in the Council's Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection.

The hardest to fill roles were generally Social Work and Occupational Therapy.

In terms of staff progression, there were opportunities in Adult Social Care for staff who stayed within the organisation and those who joined from outside to progress in the organisation.

Safeguarding work always took priority. On a daily basis, teams reviewed anyone waiting for services. It was a constant process of triaging and prioritising and where urgent services were required these would be provided and followed up.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the report be noted.

**8. CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION**

Consideration was given to the report of the Borough Solicitor.

Andrew Maughan, Borough Solicitor provided the following response to member's questions.

In terms of the meaning of 'significant' portion of Camden's population, when assessing whether something was significant there needed to be a balance struck between, for example, the numbers of people impacted and how impacted they personally were against what if any functions or role the Council might have in alleviating that impact. He explained that sometimes he included Borough Solicitor's notes with constitutional changes reports which provided further explanation. He could add these notes to the report going to Council to provide clarity on what was meant by significant.

**ACTION BY: Borough Solicitor**

The report did show that the Constitution was regularly amended and where something was not working a recommendation could be made to change this.

The banners issue was already in the Committee rules but not in the Council rules and the suggestion was to tidy this up and include in the Council procedure rules to make it clear that it applied to Council as well.

With regards to restricting individual politicians from being part of the deputation delegation, there was no right in law for people to make deputations to Council, it was suggested that this was included in the rules so that members of the public could raise issues with members without any ulterior motives. He informed members that adding this and campaigning to the rules would prevent this from happening.

With regards to the Leader's report being considered at Cabinet, it was accepted that it going to Cabinet was not scrutiny, however it was considered that members of the opposition could attend cabinet and ask questions which the leader had agreed to. In

addition, the report would be included on the Cabinet's Forward Plan which provided the chairs of scrutiny the opportunity to request that the report be brought to their Committee for consideration if they wished. The leader had made it clear he was willing to attend. If this did not work it could be looked at again.

After discussion, the Committee requested and the Borough Solicitor agreed to:

- Add Borough Solicitor's notes to the proposed changes in order to aid interpretation, though also acknowledging that these notes did not themselves form part of the Constitution; and that:
- Paragraph 27.2 should be amended to read "Deputations from those who are either standing for political office, hold political office or have publicly declared that they intend to hold political office or have publicly declared that they intend to stand and are campaigning on their own behalf will not be accepted nor will they be allowed to be part of a deputation or petition party."

The Committee

**RESOLVED:** To recommend to Council

- i) THAT the constitutional changes as set out in the report, subject to the amendment highlighted above and the addition of the Borough Solicitor's notes be agreed.

## **9. MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME 2025/26**

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Participation, Partnerships and Communication.

A member commented that under Band 7 on page 51 of the report in line with amendments in the Constitution this should be amended to include Associate Cabinet Members with Cabinet Advisers.

**ACTION BY: Head of Member Support**

A member commented that the allowance did not reflect the amount of work Councillors did as it was a full-time job and people had a misconception about the amount of money Councillors received. To attract a younger and more diverse group of people to the role more incentives were required and Councillors should lobby to see if they could be put back into the Local Government Pension Scheme as it was not fair particularly for those members that only worked full time as Councillors with no other jobs and therefore had no access to a pension.

In response to a question, officers advised that it was a government decision and no Councils included Councillors in the Local Government Pension Scheme.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the Council be recommended to:

- i) Agree the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2025/26 as set out in Appendix A of the report; and
- ii) Delegate authority to the Director of Participation, Partnerships and Communication, to take all necessary steps in relation to the operation of the scheme including updating and publicising the scheme.

**10. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2025/26**

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of People and Inclusion.

A member commented that it was good that the pay gap between the highest and lowest paid in the Council was being reduced.

**RESOLVED –**

- (i) THAT the Council be recommended to agree the pay policy statement for 2025/26 as attached at Appendix 1 of the report: and
- (ii) THAT authority be delegated to the Director of People and Inclusion to update the policy as set out in paragraph 3.6 of the report.

**11. AUDITOR'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2021/22 AND 2022/23**

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

In response to a member's question Suresh Patel of Forvis Mazars, the Council's external auditors, advised that C&AG stood for Comptroller and Auditor General - the Head of the National Audit Office who issued the opinion on the whole of government accounts.

**RESOLVED –**

That the Annual Audit Report covering 2021/22 and 2022/23 financial years, as presented at Appendix A be noted.

## **12. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2023/24**

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

### **RESOLVED –**

- (i) That the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 at Appendix A be approved; and
- (ii) To delegate authority to the Executive Director Corporate Services to make any minor amendments to the Annual Governance Statement prior to publication of the final Annual Governance Statement for 2023-24.

## **13. STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2023-24**

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

Suresh Patel of Forvis Mazars, the Council's external auditors, informed the Committee that local electives had the right to inspect the Council's accounts and ask questions and could object to something in the accounts which they considered to be unlawful during an inspection period.

The Council's inspection period ended yesterday and he had received an objection yesterday. He was required to consider the objection appropriately and then form a judgement which could have a material impact on the accounts. This would be considered tomorrow and next week.

In response to a member's question, the External Auditor advised that the Committee could still go ahead and approve the Council's accounts as presented, which could be changed under the delegations proposed for any amendments required before publication on 28<sup>th</sup> February.

In terms of the objection process, the first step was to consider whether it was an eligible objection, which was whether the objector was on Camden's electoral roll, and whether the nature of the objection was within the remit of the auditor to consider, and not about Council policy.

It was then a case of asking the Council questions about the matter and obtaining information to assure the auditor whether there was either nothing there or an issue for them to consider. In some cases, this could take months to determine, however that was not likely in this case.

In terms of reporting, the auditor would correspond with the person raising the objection copying in the Council. Lawyers could also be involved depending on the



nature of objection and decision made, providing the objector with 21 days to provide further information if they deemed there was further information. Then a final decision would be communicated to the objector. The objection could either be upheld or not as the case may be. A summarised report would be provided to the Council however the detailed letter to the objector would not be shared with the Council.

With regards to the implementation of IFRS16 on page 180 of the agenda, the Independent Member highlighted that this was a significant change and it would be helpful if the Committee could be provided with an update of what the changes were, the impact, and an action plan to address this.

The Financial Reporting Manager advised that the Accounting Policies for 2024/25 would be taken to the next meeting of the Committee at which point this issue and the implications would be referenced.

**ACTION BY: Financial Reporting Manager**

The Chief Accounting Officer commenting further on IFRS16 informed the Committee that the Council was in the process of implementing this already by conducting reviews in terms of the arrangement and support required.

Responding to a further question about the HRA account and mitigating the risks of increased litigation costs from leaseholders, the Director of Finance provided reassurance that the Council was complying with all applicable accounting rules and codes of practice. Part of that process was a robust assessment of the adequacy of the Council's reserves and provisions, advising that the Council's level of provisions and reserves were more than adequate to cover any potential risks.

**RESOLVED –**

- (i) To note the External Auditor's reports for the 2023/24 statement of accounts for the Council (Appendix A) and the Pension Fund (Appendix B);
- (ii) That the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts at Appendix C be approved;
- (iii) That the Executive Director Corporate Services be authorised, following consultation with the Chair of the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee, to approve any remaining amendments to the Statement of Accounts as the auditors complete any final outstanding matters;
- (iv) That the Chair of the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee be authorised to sign the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts.

**14. ENDING OF THE INTERNAL AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT SHARED SERVICE ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN LONDON BOROUGH OF ISLINGTON AND CAMDEN COUNCIL**

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Director Corporate Services concerning the ending of the internal audit and risk management shared service arrangements between Camden and Islington.

Responding to a question about the possibility of Councils sharing services in other areas such as Housing and Adult Social Care, Daniel Omisore, Director of Finance commented that given the size of the organisations and different cultural aspects it could be challenging to share services in that way, noting that the potential opportunities however could be derived from shared learning, procurement, and collaboration in other ways to create efficiencies.

A member remarked that it was disappointing that it had got to this point as it was a valuable service that benefitted and was useful to both Councils.

Acknowledging the comment and providing some reassurance the Director of Finance informed members that Camden had a good working relationship with Islington and was in regular touch with his counterpart and would continue to work together and share good practice where the opportunities arose.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the report be noted.

**15. CAMDEN LEARNING - ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2023/24**

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Director Corporate Services, which was introduced by Daniel Omisore, Director of Finance, Christine Gilbert, Chair of Camden Learning, and Melanie Robinson, Director of Finance and Operations for Camden Learning

In response to questions, the Chair of Camden Learning, and Director of Finance and Operations for Camden Learning provided the following information:

In terms of providing services to other schools in the Country, Camden Learning provided an early careers service for teachers which was a programme for teachers that were new to schools. The programme had taken lots of external candidates, which had helped with the organisations finances and had been beneficial to lots of schools all over the Country.

In addition, a very important strand of Camden Learning's work was providing a leading role in the Area Education Partnerships Association, which was a national

organisation for area-based partnerships, it met regularly to share information and help other organisations with the development of their services.

In relation to falling school rolls and the financial sustainability implications for Camden Learning, the way the organisation worked was much cheaper than a Council School Improvement Service and used a lot of people in schools to provide the service with a lot of the money being provided by external sources. It was not an issue in the immediate future and they were very much aware of the risk.

In terms of the accrued earnings of Camden Learning whether more could be invested in the borough, the organisation was planning to invest in a number of areas for the coming year further details of which would be provided in the scrutiny report.

In relation to multi academy trusts, Camden did not have any.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the report be noted.

**16. CAMDEN LIVING FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023/24**

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Director Corporate Services, which was introduced by Paresh Shah, Senior Business Partner and Vaishali Panchal, Senior Business Partner.

A member commented that it was not good to hear about a loss in the budget, though the future projection was good.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the report be noted.

**17. WORK AND TRAINING PLAN AND ACTION TRACKER**

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Solicitor.

In response to a member's question about whether Camden's Living operations had gone to the Housing Scrutiny Committee, the Director of Finance commented that steps were being taken to make that happen.

**RESOLVED –**

- (i) THAT the work plan for the remainder of 2024/25 as set out at Appendix A be noted;
- (ii) THAT the training programme set out at paragraph 3.4 of the report be noted; and
- (iii) THAT the action tracker for actions arising from the last meeting be noted as per Appendix C.

**18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 9.09 pm.

**CHAIR**

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**MINUTES END**