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**GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 FEBRUARY 2024**

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**Present:** Councillors P Baillie, Denness, Leggett (Chair), McCreanor, McEwing, Rayment and Blackman

**Apologies:** Councillor Chapman

30. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Chapman. The Panel noted the temporary resignation of Councillor Chapman from the Committee and the appointment of Councillor Blackman as substitute thereof in accordance with the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 4.3.

It was also noted that since the last meeting of the Committee, Council had approved the appointment of Councillor Leggett to the Committee following the resignation of Councillor Frampton.

31. **ELECTION OF CHAIR**

**RESOLVED:** that Councillor Leggett be appointed Chair for the remaining Municipal Year.

32. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (INCLUDING MATTERS ARISING)**

**RESOLVED:** that the minutes for the Committee meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

33. **REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS POLICY**

The Committee received the report of the Director of Legal and Governance detailing a review and proposed changes to the Complaints Policy.

The Committee noted that following the publication of a detailed consultation by the Ombudsman (Local Government & Social Care and Housing Ombudsman) the focus had shifted on 'putting things right' as early in the complaints process as possible. There would also be a focus on ensuring front line services take ownership of learning from complaints from the outset. This confirmed the approach taken to resolve complaints through a 'business as usual' approach within services. The authority had made this a formal part of the complaints process, giving service areas greater freedom to resolve complaints at senior level. This would allow the complaints team and Ombudsman Link officer to focus on the most complex complaints, areas of the council where complaints processes were determined by legislation and a critical friend

approach where practice around responding to complaints falls below expected performance.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) To note the content of the report and approve the proposed changes to the Corporate Complaints Policy to take effect from 1st April 2024.
- (ii) To delegate authority to the Director of Legal and Governance to approve any further changes to the Complaints Policy which may be required to respond to changes to ombudsman guidance, case law and precedent.

34. **INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT 2023-24**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Internal Auditor detailing the Annual Internal Audit Plan 2023-24.

The Committee noted there are a total of 67 audit reviews in the revised plan for 2023/24. To date, 98% of audits had been completed or were in progress as of 24th January. This represented 37 (55%) audits where the report had been finalised, 11 (16%) where the report was in draft and 18 (27%) audits currently in progress. There were currently no 'no assurance' reports or critical exceptions contained in the report for this reporting period.

The Committee requested specific information on the following:

Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery had been removed which raised concern around the areas being looked at and whether these related to sea defences. Following the meeting the report author confirmed that this was in relation to IT and the IT Service themselves were reevaluating the arrangements, this was not in relation to sea defence. Audit therefore could not add anything further at this stage while processes were reevaluated resulting in the item being removed.

Domestic Abuse and the reason why the University of Southampton were conducting an independent review on the current protocols. Following the meeting the report author confirmed. The evaluation being undertaken by the University of Southampton was agreed in December 2021 by Stronger Communities and Children's and Learning following recommendations made within the Part 4 Needs Assessment (SCC's statutory response to Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act) and in consultation with the Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategic Partnership Board. Budget was identified by Stronger Communities. This was in light of a year-on-year increase in high-risk domestic abuse referrals, an identified need for a review of risk thresholds and of current high-risk arrangements post-Covid.

The evaluation is due to be completed and published in April 2024.

**RESOLVED:** To note the Internal Audit Progress report for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April to 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

35. **EXTERNAL AUDIT - VALUE FOR MONEY REPORT 2022/23**

The Committee received and noted the report of the External Auditor detailing the 2022/23 Interim Value for Money report.

36. **HUMAN RESOURCES (HR) DATA QUARTER THREE**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development detailing quarter three Council wide information on key employment data covering disciplinaries, dismissals, suspensions and grievances.

The Committee discussed the data provided and requested where gender breakdowns was available, this be provided in future reports.

**RESOLVED** to note the latest HR statistics as set out in the report.

37. **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC - EXEMPT PAPERS INCLUDED IN THE FOLLOWING ITEM**

The Chair moved that in accordance with the Council's Constitution, specifically the Access to Information Procedure Rules contained within the Constitution, the press and public be excluded from the meeting in respect of any consideration of the exempt Appendix 2 to the following Item.

The Appendix was considered to be exempt from general publication based on Category 5 of paragraph 10.4 of the Council's Access to Information Procedure Rules. It was not in the public interest to disclose this because doing so would prejudice Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.

38. **ANNUAL RISK MANAGEMENT REPORT 2023**

The Committee received and noted the report of the Director of Legal and Governance detailing the Annual Risk Management Report 2023.