

Minutes of a meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held on Thursday, 17 September 2020 in Remote Meeting

Commenced 10.00 am
Concluded 11.15 am

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT AND INDEPENDENT GROUP
Johnson Thornton Watson	Pollard	Stubbs

Councillor Johnson in the Chair

1. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

In the interests of transparency all those who were Members of the West Yorkshire Pension Fund disclosed an interest.

Action: City Solicitor

2. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no appeals submitted by the public to review decisions to restrict documents.

3. COUNCIL MEETINGS CORONAVIRUS GOVERNANCE REVIEW - UPDATE

The report of the City Solicitor (**Document “H”**) presented an update on delivering meetings in the democratic decision making structure following the meeting of Full Council held on 8 September 2020.

It was reported that the delivery of the remote Extraordinary meeting of Council necessitated considerable preparation. This included a preparatory session for the Lord Mayor; two preparatory sessions for all Members of Council and individual support provided for Members by the Council’s IT Service.

Members were informed that a feature of the Extraordinary meeting of Council was the first use by this Council of electronic voting. Officers supporting the

meeting were able to monitor the electronic voting to ensure that it was working correctly.

It was reported that the Council's IT Service provided exemplary support to Members in the preparation for the Extraordinary meeting of Council supporting councillors with any connectivity issues both before and during the meeting.

As requested at the last meeting of this Committee Public-i did hold data on both those who were viewing live streams as committee/panel meetings were taking place and those who view the archive recordings of those meetings.

A snapshot of the data for the four week period ending 24 August 2020 was detailed at paragraph 4.1 of the report. It was clear that the public were accessing meetings in the Council's decision making structure in larger numbers through the meetings being held remotely.

It was reported that two further meetings of the Council were planned for November to consider devolution and February to consider the budget.

In response to a Members question in relation to the number of Councillors that actually attended and how many voted it was reported that there was evidence that the number of Councillors who participated in the voting was 78, 6 Councillors were absent, not clear why 6 Councillors did not participate in the vote.

A Member commented that a full debate could not take place at a remote meeting. In response it was reported that pre arranged speakers does take place at ordinary meetings and would be something that needed looking into for remote meetings as it was not straight forward.

It was suggested that as the first Council meeting held remotely was successful could consideration be given to resuming ordinary Council meetings remotely as other authorities did. In response it was reported that ordinary meetings of Council and how other authorities conducted their business remotely was being monitored but there would be technological challenges of delivering Member Question Time.

There was a suggestion that the number of members voted for, against or abstained should have been announced after the vote was taken.

The Chair emphasised the excellent service provided by IT and Governance Officers but it was crucial that all Members became IT literate which would enable them to undertake remote meetings successfully.

Resolved-

That the report be noted.

4. CORPORATE INVESTIGATIONS UNIT - ANNUAL PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

The purpose of the report of the Director of Finance and IT (**Document “I”**) was to present the annual performance information, as required by the Committee, and to provide assurance that the Council’s counter fraud arrangements were effective.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Investigation Unit in the work it does in the prevention and detection of fraud.

Members sought further clarification in relation to various aspects of the report. In response to a Members question it was reported that the Unit did not get involved in the recovery stage and could take number of years before the money is paid back to the Council but the recovery of the monies was actively chased. It was reported that there had been cases of fraud relating to the Covid 19 grants paid out which would be detailed in a future report to the Committee. Officers were actively seeking recovery of such monies.

In response to a Members question it was reported that in addition to carrying out reactive investigations in response to referrals received the Corporate Investigation Unit also carried out investigations proactively, for example, the team worked with Parking Services Officers on Disabled Persons Blue Badge “action days”. These action days were to ensure that badges were being used correctly and were a tool to obtain intelligence on persistent misuse, for responding to citizen complaints of misuse and targeting of hotspots where misuse/abuse was known to take place.

During 2019/20, 16 “action days” took place, where up to 800 badges on display were examined and verified and 30 investigations into misuse/abuse were launched.

The Chair emphasised the importance of protecting the public purse and the prevention and detection of fraud at a time when the Council was financially struggling and that the financial support was meant for people suffering hardship.

Resolved-

That the performance information contained within Document “I” be noted.

5. INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The report of the Director of Finance and IT (**Document “J”**) reviewed the service Internal Audit had provided to the Council during the financial year 2019/20.

In response to a Members question it was reported that in relation to paragraph 2.2 of the report 70 – 75 % of controls satisfied was not a concern and the level would be kept under review.

In relation to paragraph 2.9 of the report Members stressed the importance of Internal Audit continuing to keep an oversight of the Schools Financial Value

Standards and the outstanding returns. In response it was reported that this would be looked at and further information would be provided in the half year internal audit report which was due back to the Committee in January.

Resolved-

That the work undertaken by Internal Audit during 2019/20 be recognised and supported.

6. MINUTES OF THE WEST YORKSHIRE PENSION FUND (WYPF) LOCAL PENSION BOARD MEETINGS HELD ON 24 MARCH 2020 AND 23 JUNE 2020

The role of the Pension Board, as defined by sections 5(1) and (2) of the Public Service Pensions Act 2013 was to assist the Council as Scheme Manager in ensuring the effective and efficient governance and administration of the LGPS.

City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council (the Council), as Scheme Manager, as defined under section 4 of the Public Service Pensions Act 2013, had delegated legal and strategic responsibility for West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF) to the Governance and Audit Committee.

The minutes of the WYPF Pension Board meeting were submitted to this Committee (**Document “K”**).

In response to a Members question it was reported that the effects of the Covid - 19 pandemic was now included as a risk in the West Yorkshire Pension Fund Risk Register.

The West Yorkshire Pension Fund Director confirmed that business continuity arrangements were in place for both the administrative and investment side of the pension fund.

Resolved-

That the minutes of the West Yorkshire Pension Fund Board meetings held on 24 March 2020 and 23 June 2020 were considered.

Chair

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a correct record at the next meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee.

THESE MINUTES HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER