

**A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS & AUDIT SUB BOARD
WAS HELD ON 19 SEPTEMBER 2024**

Councillors Cox, Mrs Cully, Hutchison, Hylands and Raffaelli

13. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE

There were none

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none

15. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SUB BOARD HELD ON 20 JUNE 2024

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2024 were signed as a true and correct record.

A Member was advised that the CIA had provided more details of the projects without business cases, and that the recruiting to the review was ongoing.

16. DEPUTATIONS- STANDING ORDER 3.4

There were none

17. PUBLIC QUESTIONS - STANDING ORDER 3.5

There were none

18. AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

Consideration was given to a report by the Chief Internal Auditor (CIA) updating the sub board on the progress of the Audit Plan 2024/2025.

The CIA introduced his report by explaining that this was the standard report that is brought to board. He advised that leave over the summer had caused the schedule to slip a little but there were no areas of concern. Two audits have been added and there is no reason to believe that the plan will not be completed.

In answer to a members question the CIA explained that the tensor System Follow up- Corporate audit would be focused on officers Tensor time recording, and not Members.

RESOLVED: That the Standards and Audit sub board noted the progress of the Audit Plan 2024/2025.

19. RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY AND STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

Standards & Audit Sub Board
19 September 2024

Consideration was given to a report by the Chief Internal Auditor (CIA) seeking approval from members in regards to the Risk Policy 2024 and presenting the Strategic Risk Register for noting.

The CIA advised members that the policy had been updated to change the risk scoring matrix to make it more aligned to the internal audit risk ratings.

Members pointed out a number of corrections needed and asked for officer's titles to be shown in full.

In answer to a Member's question, the CIA agreed to review how specific timelines can be included in the register, to more clearly identify those ongoing. Members also suggested that additional columns were included to give more financial detail and what the outcome of mitigation will be.

Members were advised that risk 14, The Criterion, remained on the register despite its score only being 6 as it had previously been scored higher. Members asked that more detail of any change of score to be included in the document.

RESOLVED: That the sub board members approved the Risk Management Policy and noted the Strategic Risk Register.

20. FACILITIES MANAGEMENT UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Housing setting out the actions taken so far by the Town Hall security officer group and its forward plan.

The Chief Internal Auditor reminded Members that the Town Hall Security group was formed to review the issues identified in the pre meeting for the Facilities audit, which was subsequently removed from the audit plan.

Members were pleased to hear that the security at Grange farm was much improved and that because the main door locks had been changed there could be no unaccounted for keys in peoples possession.

RESOLVED: That the Sub Board noted the report.

21. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN REVIEW 2023/2024

Consideration was given to a report by the Chief Executive advising the sub board of the Annual Review Letter 2024 received from the Local Government Ombudsman.

RESOLVED: That the sub board noted the report.

22. HOUSING SERVICE ANNUAL COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2023/2024

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Housing (HOH) presenting the

Standards & Audit Sub Board
19 September 2024

- Housing Services annual complaints performance and service improvement report for the period 01 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, in accordance with the Housing Service Complaints Policy and the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- The annual Self-Assessment Form against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

The HOH advised that comments and feedback from Members would be published as part of the self assessment.

Members were advised that on the points they raised:

- i) More detail would be included to identify which category of complaint went through to the next stage which would be helpful for analysis
- ii) Further interrogation of the causes behind the complaints and what had caused deadlines to be missed to be included in analysis
- iii) A remedy policy would be developed to identify remedies and compensation due at an earlier stage.

Members were advised that the process to analyse the complaints would continue to be refined over time to understand root causes and aid service improvement. There would also be a focus on trying to resolve issues at service enquiry stage to prevent issues being escalated as a complaint.

The HOH explained that they would soon be recording all telephone calls. This would help with training of staff, improve service delivery and aid complaint resolution. Members were pleased with this and saw it as a good training tool and a way to refresh recollections of conversations.

In answer to a Member's question, the HOH explained the process followed for mould and damp complaints, the thorough investigation that is carried out, and the advice that is given subsequently. A Damp & Mould Policy is currently in draft form.

Members were advised that contractors would now be obliged to respond to complaints in the same format as the Housing department in line with the Complaint Handling Code. These complaints together with any learning will be included in future annual performance reports.

The HOH advise members that the Remedy Package Policy was good practice, recommended by the Housing Ombudsman There is a policy in draft form.

A complaints performance and service improvement report will be presented to Board annually and a quarterly complaints performance report will be reported to the Chief Management Team.

Members were concerned that the additional work would put pressure on officers. The HOH advised that additional staff would be required, in particular a dedicated complaints officer, responsible for the analysis and investigation of customer complaints and Councillor enquiries.

The Sub Board recognised the challenges the Housing department faces going forward with this additional workload and the loss of the HOH. They wished to record their thanks to Julie Smith and wish her well, and to pass on their thanks to the whole team for the work they do so well.

RESOLVED: That the sub board considered the report and noted the completed self-assessment form for scrutiny and challenge.

23. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION PERFORMANCE JULY 1ST 2023- JUNE 30TH 2024

Consideration was given to a report by the Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer (BSMO) reporting to the sub board on the performance of the administration of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.

The BSMO brought Members attention to the increase in number of requests received, and the decrease in time taken to respond.

Members were advised that the increase in requests for non GBC information also reduced the time taken as they can be closed the same day.

Members were keen to know if there was a reason for the increase in requests and were advised that the number of requests received can increase if the subject matter is in the public eye. Examples given included the issue of mould in social housing, and local developments.

Members wished to thank the Democratic Services team for dealing with the increasing workload.

The BSMO advised that the bar was high for vexatious requests and it was unlikely to get to that stage.

RESOLVED: That the sub board noted the report.

24. GIFTS & HOSPITALITY RETURN FOR COUNCIL STAFF

Consideration was given to a report by the Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer (BSMO) advising the sub board of the Gifts and Hospitality declared by Council Staff for the period April 2023- March 2024.

The BSMO advised that there was nothing to add to the report and agreed it was refreshingly simple and completely complied with the policy.

RESOLVED: That the Sub Board noted the report.

25. ANY OTHER ITEMS

CHAIRMAN

Concluded at 7.15 pm