

Meeting	audit and Governance Committee
Date	7 february 2023
Present	Councillors Lomas (Chair), Fisher (Vice-Chair), Cuthbertson, Wann, Webb, Leigh (Independent Member) And Fitzpatrick
Officers in Attendance	Bryn Roberts - Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer
Apologies	Councillor Musson

37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any personal interests not included on the Register of Interests, any prejudicial interests or any disclosable pecuniary interests which they may have in respect of business on the agenda. None were declared.

38. MINUTES

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2023 be approved and then signed by the Chair as a correct record.

39. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

It was reported that there had been four registrations to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

Cllr Warters questioned the focus of the Local Government Association (LGA) report and Council response to the Public Interest Report (PIR) as the PIR related to actions of the Council leader and not wider issues. He questioned the success of any changes whilst the Council Leader remained in post.

Gwen Swinburn stated that issues relating to the PIR had been turned into an attack on all Councillors. She raised concerns about the relationships between Council Officers and Councillors and suggested Councillors needed to always get written advice from Senior Council Officers to avoid issues.

Cllr Douglas raised the PIR findings in relation to the Council Leader being named in a tribunal by the former Council Chief Executive, before he was part of the meeting which agreed a financial gift to the former Chief Executive as part of their exit package from the Council. She also questioned if the culture of the Council had changed.

Jo Coles also raised the findings of the PIR in relation to the Council paying a financial gift to the former Chief Executive as part of their exit package when local residents were struggling financially. She noted several areas she felt money could have been spent and raised concerns about the culture at the Council as outlined in the report.

40. REPORT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION INTO THE PIR

The Committee were joined by Mark Edgell from the LGA who introduced their report. He noted that the LGA had found that the Council had done well responding to the five narrow recommendations in the PIR but questioned whether the actions undertaken to date had made the significant difference required. He also highlighted the LGAs concerns regarding culture issues at the Council. Finally he outlined the LGA's recommendations to the Council which included the need to improve cross party working, a three year improvement plan, and a corporate peer challenge.

The Committee considered the report and raised a number of questions to Mark Edgell about how the Council could improve and its efforts to date to address the issues in the PIR. It was noted that further work was required to properly identify the distinct roles of Councillors and that of Officers. Members enquired as to whether all Councillors and specifically opposition Councillors should have greater involvement in decision making. It was noted that opposition Councillors had the opportunity to engage through things such as scrutiny and call ins.

Developing and delivering an enhanced Councillor training program was discussed. With local elections in May 2023 induction training was highlighted as being key for Councillors post-election. Involvement in training was discussed and it was noted that a online register was being developed to log attendance. However, it was acknowledged that there was not a

mechanism to reprimand Councillors who chose not to attend training sessions.

Tackling poor Councillor conduct was considered and it was noted that Councillors would need a certain level of personal responsibility to make improvements alongside the new Member Code of Conduct, colleagues being encouraged to reinforce positive behaviour, as well as being, a role for the Monitoring Officer, Group Leaders, and Group Whips to address problems. The Committee considered the LGA recommendation to take part in a peer challenge something the Council had not had since 2016. Members agreed that the opportunity of a peer challenge could assist in improving the Council's culture issues.

Resolved:

- i. That the Council undertake a three year review reporting to the Audit and Governance Committee to review the Council's performance against the ten recommendations outlined by the LGA and to report on the progress of Member training;
- ii. To recommend to the Chief Operating Officer and the Leader of the Council to engage the LGA about initiating a Corporate Peer Review;

Reason: To ensure the overall culture of the Council is improved following the PIR.

Cllr Lomas, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.30 pm and finished at 7.10 pm].

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