

Democratic Governance Audit

Summary

- 1 This report advises members on the Council's response to a recent internal audit report in relation to democratic governance.

Background

- 2 As part of their routine audit plan Veritau recently undertook an audit of democratic governance. That included not only consideration of the Council's formal Member and Officer decision making arrangements but also, key partnerships, ward meetings and information on the website.

- 3 The audit concluded:

“Overall, the council's democratic and decision making processes contain sufficient controls to manage risks to a satisfactory level”

As a result no priority one recommendations for improvement were made. However, the audit was useful in identifying some areas where improvements could be made. This report sets out the steps taken in response to those findings.

- 4 The audit identified that there is not a consistent understanding across the organisation as to who can take key decisions. No example though was identified of a key decision having been taken by someone without authority to do so.
- 5 In response to this all members of CMT have received a briefing from the Director of Customer and Business Support Services and the Monitoring Officer in relation to the Council's decision making arrangements and the issue of key decisions

was an element of this. In addition, as Members are aware, the current constitution review does have an aim of making the document as understandable as possible and any need to further simplify the wording of the rules on key decisions will be considered within that review, and as proposed within the audit recommendations.

- 6 The audit noted that the forward plan did not make it clear whether a Cabinet Member intended to hold a public decision making session. The plan now makes that clear.
- 7 The audit noted the possibility of inconsistency between directorates in recording officer decisions. The Council recorded significant officer decisions many years before there was any legal requirement to do so and still exceeds legal requirements in that non – executive decisions are published. All Members of CMT have been provided with a copy of the current CLG guidance on recording officer decisions and the matter has been discussed at the briefing session referred to above.
- 8 It was identified that some information on modgov was not up to date. The fact that modgov has a different appearance from the main website and does not have a common search function was also noted. All outstanding information relating to Members and their appointments to Committees and other bodies has been updated within Modgov, including any changes made at the recent Annual Meeting and any changes to personal information, eg addresses etc, notified to Democratic Services. The website issues, including integration of the Modgov search engine, have been raised with both the Communications and ICT teams. Work is currently ongoing to bring the Council's webpages and intranet site together and part of this work will also seek to address the issues identified in the audit.
- 9 In relation to the Without Walls partnership it was identified that up to date agendas and minutes were not available on the website. Without Walls now has its own website where agendas and minutes dating back to 2003 are published.
- 10 A number of Ward meeting minutes were not available on modgov when the audit was undertaken. The relevant service has agreed to ensure that draft minutes of the annual Resident Forums are published promptly in future.

- 11 The remaining recommendations related to the wider Council's use of technology and social media and the use of the website to ensure openness and transparency. Those issues are being explored within the rewiring programme and recently the city's residents have been invited to participate in the development of a new website and the creation of an open data web portal. This will enable the recommendations around integrating Mod Gov to be met. The Council has recently created a specific web page for foreign travel and is committed to publishing what the public consider to be 'sensitive' expenditure. It is expected that staff hospitality will be published in the near future.

Council Plan

- 12 Good democratic governance is key to the Council being an effective organisation.

Implications

- 13 There are no implications to this report in relation to:

- **Finance**
- **Human Resources (HR)**
- **Equalities**
- **Legal**
- **Crime and Disorder**
- **Information Technology (IT)**
- **Property**

Recommendations

- 14 Members are asked to:

Note the progress made in response to the audit recommendations

Reason

To allow the Audit and Governance Committee to monitor progress

Contact Details

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the report:**

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**Report
Approved**

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Specialist Implications Officers

Not applicable

Wards Affected: Not applicable

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers

None

Annexes

None