

BUSINESS EFFICIENCY BOARD

At a meeting of the Business Efficiency Board held on Wednesday, 23 November 2016 at the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors M. Lloyd Jones (Chair), Joe Roberts (Vice-Chair), J. Bradshaw, Cole, C. Loftus, A. Lowe, MacManus, McDermott, N. Plumpton Walsh, J. Stockton and Wall

Apologies for Absence: None

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: E. Dawson, I. Leivesley, M. Murphy, A. Scott and L. Cox

Also in attendance: Georgia Jones, Grant Thornton External Auditors and one member of the public

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

BEB15 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2016 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

BEB16 EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE REPORT

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, which provided an update from Grant Thornton (External Auditors), regarding:

- Progress made in delivering their responsibilities as the Council's External Auditors; and
- A summary of emerging national issues and developments that could be relevant to the work of the Board.

It was noted that from 2017/18, local authorities would need to publish their audited financial statements by 31 July each year, which was earlier than the current deadline of 30 September.

Georgia Jones, Audit Manager from Grant Thornton, attended the meeting to present the report and then dealt with Members' questions.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

BEB17 PROCUREMENT STRATEGY 2016-19 - PROGRESS REVIEW

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, which provided an update on progress with delivery of the Council's Procurement Strategy 2016-2019 (the Strategy), as at 31 October 2016.

The Strategy was approved by the Board in June 2016 and operated as a strategic function across the whole organisation to deliver cash savings and cost reductions. It was noted that the Strategy followed a format commended by the Local Government Association's National Procurement Strategy for Local Government in England 2014, and was underpinned by four key areas:-

- Making savings;
- Supporting Local Economies;
- Leadership; and
- Modernising Procurement.

Members were advised that the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 required public authorities to have regard to economic, social and environmental wellbeing in connection with public service contracts. Halton had embraced this requirement by placing Social Value into all of its procurement activities, where relevant and proportionate. It was reported that over the past few months, Halton had been involved in the development of the National Social Value Toolkit, alongside the Cabinet Office and a number of public sector bodies, which was launched on 13 September 2016.

As this would be the final meeting before Lorraine Cox, Divisional Manager, Procurement, left the authority to take up her new post, the Board wished to place on record their thanks for her work in Halton over the past ten years, and wished her well for the future.

RESOLVED: That progress with the Council's Procurement Strategy 2016-19, as set out in the report, be noted.

BEB18 PROCUREMENT STRATEGY - EXTERNAL AUDITOR

The Board considered a report of the Operational

Director, Finance, regarding the appointment of external auditors.

The Board was advised that the Council's current external auditor was Grant Thornton. Following the closure of the Audit Commission, such contract was managed by the Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA), a not for profit company, limited by guarantee, and established by the Local Government Association.

It was reported that these transitional arrangements for external audit would expire at the end of the 2017/18 accounts, and the Council would then assume responsibility for the local appointment of its auditor. However, it was noted that the Council could opt into arrangements to have its auditor appointed on its behalf.

The report set out options for the local appointment of external auditors. It was noted that the Council had until December 2017 to make an appointment, but in practical terms contract negotiation needed to commence in Spring 2017 to meet that deadline.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to opt into the sector-led procurement of external auditors that will be undertaken by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA).

Operational
Director - Finance

BEB19 SCHEDULE 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

The Board considered:

- 1) Whether Members of the press and public should be excluded from the meeting of the Board during consideration of the following item of business in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be considered, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972; and
- 2) Whether the disclosure of information was in the public interest, whether any relevant exemptions were applicable and whether, when applying the public interest test and exemptions, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed

that in disclosing the information.

RESOLVED: That as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information, members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

BEB20 INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, which provided Members with a summary of internal audit work completed since the last progress report in June 2016. The report also provided details of progress against the 2016/17 Audit Plan.

It was noted that a total of twelve Internal Audit reports had been finalised since the last progress report. An overall assurance opinion was provided for each engagement. In addition, the report detailed follow-up processes which monitored whether management actions had been effectively implemented on previous audit recommendations.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the update on progress against the 2016/17 Internal Audit Plan be received;
- 2) the completed Internal Audit reports be noted; and
- 3) the progress made in regard to the implementation of previous Internal Audit recommendations be noted.

Meeting ended at 7.15 p.m.