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BUSINESS EFFICIENCY BOARD

At a meeting of the Business Efficiency Board held on Wednesday, 18 November 2020 held remotely.

Present: Councillors M. Lloyd Jones (Chair), E. Cargill, A. Lowe, MacManus, McDermott, Philbin, Joe Roberts, G. Stockton and J. Stockton

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Wall and N. Plumpton Walsh

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: E. Dawson, I. Leivesley, M. Murphy, S. Baker and G. Ferguson

Also in attendance: S. Ironmonger, M. Green and S. Nixon (Grant Thornton).
One member of the press.

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

| | <i>Action</i> |
|--|---------------|
| BEB13 MINUTES | |
| <p>The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2020 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.</p> | |
| BEB14 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2018/19 | |
| <p>The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, which sought approval of the revised 2018/19 Annual Governance Statement (AGS).</p> | |
| <p>The Board was reminded that at its meeting on 24 July 2019, the 2018/19 AGS had been presented, with a further updated version presented to the Board on 24th February 2020. The delay in the completion of the external audit of the 2018/19 statement of accounts had necessitated that the document be updated again. This ensured that the AGS was current at the time of the approval of the 2018/19 statement of accounts.</p> | |
| <p>Once approved the AGS would be signed by the Council Leader and Chief Executive and published on the Council's website.</p> | |
| <p>RESOLVED: That the updated Annual Governance</p> | |

Statement be approved.

BEB15 2018/19 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS AUDIT FINDINGS REPORT AND LETTER OF REPRESENTATION

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, which sought approval for the Council's 2018/19 Statement of Accounts (the latest version of which was enclosed with the Agenda), and the report of the Audit Findings of the External Auditor (Grant Thornton) on the 2018/19 financial statements. The report also sought approval of the Council's Letter of Representation.

It was reported that the Statement of Accounts set out the Council's financial performance for the year in terms of revenue and capital spending and also presented the year-end financial position as reflected in the balance sheet. The key elements were detailed in the report.

The Board had previously received a number of reports setting out the reasons for the delay in the Council publishing the audit certificate or opinion on the 2018/19 Statement of Accounts. Officers had been working with the External Auditor to reach resolution on a number of technical accounting issue changes. Agreement had been reached in resolving the issues and changes had been made to the draft Statement of Accounts, passed to the Council's External Auditor (Grant Thornton) on 31 May 2019. Changes were set out in the Audit Findings report which was attached as Appendix 2 to the report.

The External Auditor presented the Audit Findings report which summarised the findings from 2018/19 external audit. Section 3 of the report also presented the External Auditor's findings on the Value for Money (VFM) conclusion. It was noted that the overall conclusion was that the Council had proper arrangements in all significant respects to ensure it delivered value for money in its use of resources.

The Board wished to place on record their thanks to the Operational Director, Finance and the Finance Team for their work in the preparation of the accounts and to Grant Thornton for their work on the audit.

Arising from the discussion it was noted that:

- Steps had been taken to improve technical issues between the Council and the External Auditors including development of IT software sharing and weekly meetings; and

- A report on the estimation of pension liabilities could be brought to a future meeting.

RESOLVED: That

1. the Letter of Representation in Appendix 1 be approved;
2. the External Auditor's 2018/19 Audit Findings Report in Appendix 2 be received and approved; and
3. the Council's 2018/19 Statement of Accounts in Appendix 3 be approved.

BEB16 2019/20 AUDIT OF ACCOUNTS - VERBAL UPDATE

The Board was advised that the Council's 2019/20 accounts had now been received by Grant Thornton and due to the COVID-19 pandemic work was ongoing remotely to complete the audit of those accounts. All field work was expected to be complete in January 2021 and the audit findings would be brought to a Board meeting in March 2021

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

BEB17 CORPORATE RISK REGISTER BIENNIAL UPDATE 2020/21

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, on the bi-annual update of the Corporate Risk Register.

The Board was advised that the Council recognised its responsibility to manage both internal and external risks as a key component of good corporate governance. At Directorate level, arrangements were in place for the high risk mitigation measures on the Directorate Risk Registers to be reviewed and updated mid-year, in line with Directorate Business Plans. Progress was then reported to Management Team and Policy and Performance Boards.

It was reported that the Risk Control Measures had been reviewed and updated in line with current changes within the Authority and as proposed by managers and stakeholders. The risks had been re-prioritised so that people, (the community and staff), took priority. These were set out in the report.

The Board discussed the impact of COVID-19 and the pressure that it had brought on the Council's finances

and budget.

The Board also commended the work of the staff for their ongoing support for Halton residents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLVED: That

1. the progress of actions be noted; and
2. the robustness of the Corporate Risk Register and the adequacy of the associated risk management arrangements be noted.

BEB18 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.

BEB19 INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Board considered a report of the Divisional Manager, Audit, Procurement and Operational Finance, which provided Members with a summary of internal audit work completed since the last progress report on 21st July 2020. The report also highlighted matters relevant to the Board's responsibilities as the Council's Audit Committee.

It was noted that a total of 15 Internal Audit reports had been finalised since the last progress report. An overall assurance opinion was provided for each audit engagement.

It was reported that as a result of COVID-19, internal audit had needed to adapt and change its focus in the short term. As previously agreed by the Board in July, changes to planned audit work had been agreed with the operational Director – Finance. Revisions to the Audit Plan had seen internal audit complete reviews of the systems for the payment of the Business Support Grants and the Discretionary Grant Fund. In addition a substantial piece of work was ongoing in Adult Social Care providing assurance over the coding of packages of care.

On behalf of the Board the Chair thanked the internal audit team for their work.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 8.03 p.m.