

29 September 2022 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillors Clayden (Chair), Chapman (Vice-Chair), Brooks, Chace, Oliver-Redgate and Oppler

[Note: Councillor Oliver-Redgate was absent from the meeting for all or part of discussions at Minute Items 309 – 315]

309. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Goodheart and Staniforth.

310. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

311. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2022 were approved by the Committee. These would be signed at the end of the meeting.

312. ITEMS ON THE AGENDA THAT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCE

The Chair confirmed that there were no urgent matters for this meeting.

313. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair confirmed that no questions had been submitted for this meeting.

314. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS SEPTEMBER 2022

The Chair welcomed Iona Bond, Senior Audit and Counter Fraud Manager, from Southern Internal Audit Partnership (SIAP), who then presented the progress report to the Committee. She explained that work was progressing well, there had been a mid-year review of the plan with the Corporate Management Team, and the changes made were set out in section 8 of the document. SIAP were satisfied that the audit schedule for the year would enable an annual assurance statement to be provided.

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There were no questions from Members.

The Committee noted the report.

315. FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS POLICY - UPDATE

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Group Head of Law and Governance presented the report to the Committee. He explained that as a result of a complaint that went through the Council's internal complaints process and then to the Housing Ombudsman, various recommendations had been made by the Housing Ombudsman, a number of which related to the policy itself and changes required to it. Some of the recommended changes were as a result of new guidance regarding the updated Complaints Handling Code to be published by the Housing Ombudsman in October. The changes were set out at Appendix 3 in the table. The existing and update policies were also attached to the report. The Group Head of Law and Governance went on to say that he would not go into the details of the complaint as this contained personal information regarding the tenant involved, however, it was felt these changes needed to be made as a result of the outcome of the complaint, and also in order to comply with the revised Complaints Handling Code.

The Chair explained to Members that this was an update that the Committee were obliged to agree at the request of the Housing Ombudsman. He then invited questions from Members.

One Member stated that the Housing Ombudsman ruled against the Council and in favour of the complainant, and an explanation of what led to the Officer failings, what the failings were and why they occurred was requested. It was stated that this should be made public. The Group Head of Law and Governance explained that reviewing the complaint was not in the remit of the Audit & Governance Committee but could be a matter for the Housing and Wellbeing Committee to look at. The Member stated that he did not feel the issue was with Housing, but instead with how the complaint had been dealt with by the legal department, which it was agreed would be a matter for Corporate Support to review. The Group Head of Law and Governance confirmed that he would take this matter to the attention of the Lead Officers and Chair of Corporate Support Committee with a view to this being added to the Work Programme for that Committee.

A typing error in the policy was pointed out, this was on Page 33 of the agenda pack in the bullet points, which contained the word 'your' instead of 'you are'.

There was then a discussion regarding the suggested wording on page 7 of the policy at the second to last paragraph, and it was asked why the wording was being changed from 'All complaints relating to Landlord/Tenant social landlord services will **follow** the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.' to 'All complaints relating to Landlord/Tenant social landlord services will **have regard to** the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code'. The Group Head of Law and Governance explained that this reflected the usual legal language that should be used in such a policy.

The recommendation was Proposed by Councillor Chace and Seconded by Councillor Chapman.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the Audit & Governance Committee adopts the revised Feedback and Complaints Policy as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

316. WORK PROGRAMME

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Internal Audit Manager presented the Work Programme to the Committee. He explained there was a change to this, which was that the review by Southern Internal Audit Partnership of the Audit Charter would be presented in February 2023, along with the next Annual Audit Plan. It was explained that the Work Programme was a living document and was subject to change.

It was asked if new items could be added if required to reflect financial events that may occur, which the Internal Audit Manager confirmed could happen.

The Chair reminded Members that there was a virtual Member Briefing regarding Treasury on Monday 3 October 2022, and highly recommended that Members attended this.

The Work Programme was noted.

(The meeting concluded at 10.21 am)