

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee

Held in the Council Chamber at 6.00 pm on Thursday, 21 April 2022

### PRESENT

Councillors: Alex Postan (Chairman), Joy Aitman, Luci Ashbourne, Andrew Beaney, Owen Collins, Julian Cooper, Maxine Crossland, Rupert Dent, Colin Dingwall, Harry Eaglestone, C Richard Langridge, Elizabeth Poskitt and Alex Wilson.

Officers: Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Senior Strategic Support Officer), Emma Cathcart (Counter Fraud Unit Manager) and Georgina Dyer (Business Partner Accountant)

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### **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2022 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

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### **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jake Acock, Gill Hill, Dan Levy and Dean Temple.

Councillor Owen Collins substituted for Councillor Duncan Enright, and Councillor Maxine Crossland substituted for Councillor Martin McBride.

The Chairman took this opportunity to thank Councillor Crossland for her service as a District Councillor as she would not be standing for re-election. He acknowledged her previous career as a teacher, her dedication to the role and wished her well for the future.

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### **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

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### **Participation of the Public**

There was none.

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### **Whistle-Blowing Policy**

The Committee received a report from the Head of Service, Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit which presented an updated Whistleblowing policy for comment, prior to its consideration at Cabinet.

This updated and replaced the existing Whistleblowing policy to highlight key legislation and the roles and responsibilities of Members, officers and other parties. The revised policy was attached at Annex A to the report.

The Counter Fraud Unit Manager, Emma Cathcart, introduced the report and explained that this was an overarching policy for partner councils and Publica. She advised that an easy to use flowchart would be introduced when the policy was rolled out to employees, via the intranet. In response to a question from Councillor Dent, officers confirmed that Ubico was not included because in this respect they were treated as a contractor and would have its own policies for dealing with its employees.

Councillor Postan queried how the communication was carried out should a case be resolved. He was advised that the Audit & GP Committee would receive a report but Members were reminded that these cases were often confidential and had to be handled sensitively.

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Following further discussion, officers confirmed that individual's roles were protected and they were confident that the processes were robust to avoid any misinformation or issues being 'glossed over'.

Having considered the report and having heard from the officers present, the Committee **Recommended** that the policy be supported and approved by Cabinet.

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### Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit Report

The Committee received a report from the Head of Service, Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit which provided them with assurance over the counter fraud activities of the Council. Direct updates would continue to be provided biannually.

Work plans are presented to the Committee detailing progress and results for consideration and comment as the body charged with governance in this area.

The report also provided the annual update in relation to the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA), the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 (IPA) and the Council's existing authorisation arrangements.

The Committee were asked to note the report and the work plans attached at Annex A.

Emma Cathcart introduced the report and explained the recent name change of the unit which it was felt better explained the role of the department. She advised that the administration of the Business Grants had been a huge undertaking, as outlined at section 2.2 of the report, and this work was ongoing. In addition, the team had taken confidence from the matches found within their work streams with the Cabinet Office's National Fraud Initiative.

Councillor Beaney asked for clarification on a recent Member Code of Conduct complaint which appeared to have been ongoing for an unacceptable length of time. The Democratic Services Manager advised that none of the delay had been as a result of the work undertaken by the CFEU, who had produced their report in a timely manner. The delay was as a result of changes in the role of Monitoring Officer at WODC along with difficulties liaising with the Independent Persons and had been ongoing since last year. It was hoped that a hearing could be scheduled in for June this year.

Further comments and queries from Members included the mix of 'chancers' versus real fraudsters and officers explained some of the processes and the level of evidence required.

Members thanked Mrs Cathcart for her report and noted the RIPA update.

It was therefore,

**Resolved** that the report and work plans at Annex A, be noted.

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### Internal Audit Report

Members noted the report of Internal Activity 2021/22.

The 2022/23 Internal Audit Annual Plan and the Internal Audit Charter was approved, therefore

**Resolved** by committee approval.

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### Minutes of Standards Sub-Committee

The minutes of the Standards Sub-Committee held on 23 March 2022 were received and noted.

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Officers advised that the Member Code of Conduct and Hearing Panel Procedure Rules considered at the meeting were on the Council agenda for the following week.

It was therefore,

**Resolved** that the minutes be noted.

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### **Minutes of Miscellaneous Licensing Sub-Committees**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the Miscellaneous Licensing Sub-Committee dated 9 September 2021, 27 January and 17 February 2002, be noted.

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### **Exclusion of Public and Press**

**Resolved:** That, in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in paragraph 1,2 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, the public were excluded from the meeting for the remaining item of business.

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### **Minutes of Miscellaneous Licensing Sub-Committee**

**Resolved** that the confidential minutes of the Miscellaneous Licensing Sub-Committee dated 2 July 2021 and 17 February 2022, be noted.

The Meeting closed at 6.40pm

CHAIR