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Date: 27th September 2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

Audit and Standards Committee – 28th September 2021

I refer to Agenda Item 8 for the meeting of the Audit and Standards committee scheduled for Tuesday 28th September 2021 at 6.00pm. and attach the report 'Audit and Standards Committee Annual Report 2020/21' marked as "to follow".

Yours faithfully,

BRENT DAVIS

Executive Director - Operations

To: All Members of the Audit and Standards Committee

Councillors H. Walmsley (Chair), M. Rudkin (Vice-Chair), B. Beetham, T. Cooper, L. Downs, L. Hocking, J. Kennaugh, K. Kondakor, S. Markham, J. Singh, R. Tromans, and Mr G Sonola.

NUNEATON AND BEDWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to: Standards Committee – 28 September 2021

From: Director – Democracy, Planning and Public Protection

Subject: Audit and Standards Committee Annual Report 2020-2021

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To present the Annual Standards Section Report 2020-2021 for approval.

2. Recommendation

2.1 The draft 2020/2021 Annual report as set out in Appendix A be approved; and

2.2 The report be published as indicated in the report.

3. Background

3.1 A draft Audit & Standards Committee Annual Report for the past municipal year is attached at Appendix A. The report summarises some of the key activities of the Audit and Standards Committee between May 2020 and May 2021. It is recommended that, subject to approval, the Annual Report be:

- published on the Council's website;
- circulated to all Members (including co-opted members);
- circulated to all Members of the Management Team;
- featured in the next available e-edition of In Touch; &
- placed in reception areas in both Nuneaton Town Hall, Bedworth Civic Hall, and all the libraries in the Borough.

PHILIP RICHARDSON

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council

Annual Report of the Audit and Standards Committee

2020- 2021

Introduction

As Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee (“the Committee”), I am pleased to present the Annual Report, which outlines the work undertaken by the Audit & Standards in 2020/2021.

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council (“the Council”) remains committed to working under the Standards Regime established by the Localism Act 2011 (‘the Act’). The Council’s Code of Conduct was approved by Council in July 2012.

The Committee has worked closely with the Council’s Officers to ensure that the principles of good governance remain central to the business of the Council and, instils public confidence in those elected by the people of the Borough.

We will seek to continuously improve the Council’s audit & standards arrangements and have achieved a number of goals as set out in the Audit and Standards Committee Work Programme 2020/2021. We have been particularly involved in work around:

- The Council’s governance arrangements;
- A review of counter-fraud activity;
- The annual review of registration of interests, hospitality and gifts by members and officers;
- Reviewing the arrangements for the Independent Remuneration Panel for Members’ Allowances;
- The Annual report from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman;
- The Code of Recommended Practice on Local authority Publicity; and
- 6 monthly reporting on Member complaints.

In addition, a review of protocols included the revision of the:

- Registration of interests, hospitality and gifts by members and officers;
- Adjustments procedurally and practically to the recent Pandemic
- Protocol for member/Employee Relations
- Guidance for members on the Use of Social Media; and
- The Media Protocol

The Work Programme for 2021/2022 includes such matters as:

- A member training programme for Audit & Standards members;
- Reporting on Complaints on a 6 monthly basis;

- The annual review of registration of interests, hospitality and gifts by members and officers;
- The Annual Report of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman;
- A review of the Complaints Procedure – to streamline the procedure
- A review of the Mayor's Protocol;
- Consideration of the Treasury Management Reports;
- Consideration and approval of the Council's Annual Statement of Accounts;
- Consideration of the External Audit letter from the Council's external auditors, Grant Thornton; &
- A review of Corporate Governance Arrangements.

The work and achievements of the Committee would be harder and less effective without the support and contributions of the Members and, the Community. I would like to express my thanks to them. I would additionally record my appreciation of the support provided by the Officers. I know how challenging times have been especially during the Pandemic.

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council has always sought to achieve the highest levels of ethical standards and this new Committee will bring a fresh approach to this.

I have pleasure in presenting the 2020-2021 report.

Councillor Hayden Walmsley
Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council

Background

This report records the activities of the Council's Audit & Standards Committee for the municipal year commencing May 2020 and ending in May 2021. Despite the year being dominated by the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic, the Committee managed to continue operating under the special arrangements put in place by the Government to facilitate virtual meetings.

1. The Role of the Audit and Standards Committee

The role and functions of the Committee are clearly set out in Article 9 of the Council's Constitution. This covers such matters as:

- To review the Council's corporate governance arrangements against the Good Governance framework, and consider annual governance report and assurances;
- To consider reports on the effectiveness of internal controls, and monitor the implementation of agreed actions;
- To monitor the Council's Anti-Fraud Strategy;
- To receive the Annual Ombudsman Report and make recommendations to Full Council as necessary.
- To consider the external auditor's Annual Letter, relevant reports, and the report to those charged with governance
- To advise and recommend on the effectiveness of the relationships between external and internal audit, and other inspection agencies or relevant bodies.
- To approve the Annual Statement of Accounts.
- To review the Council's Treasury Management activities, and monitor the performance against the approved Treasury Management indicators.
- assisting Councillors and co-opted Members to observe the Members' Code of Conduct;
- advising the Council on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct; &
- monitoring the operation of the Councillor's' Code of Conduct;

2 The Audit and Standards Committee

- 2.1 The Audit and Standards Committee meetings are open meetings and members of the public are welcome to attend. Committee agendas, reports and minutes are available on the Council website and the meetings are live-streamed on Youtube.

- 2.2 The Audit and Standards Committee, for 2020/21 comprised of 11 Councillors. In addition, the Committee has one co-opted member to assist the Committee in fulfilling its purpose.

3 Work of the Committee

Our work during 2020/21 has continued to centre on the following main areas:

3.1 Maintaining the highest ethical standards

The Council has ensured that members have been trained to understand:

- the Code of Conduct for Councillors;
- the importance of Maintaining a Register of Member Interest – the code of conduct includes provision for the registration and disclosure of “disclosable pecuniary interests” as defined in regulations. Members with disclosable pecuniary interests in the business of their authorities are prohibited from participating in such business unless they have a dispensation. The Localism Act 2011 has introduced criminal offences relating to failure to register disclosable pecuniary interests;
- that it is their responsibility to register their interests. The declaration of interest forms appear on the council’s website.
- the Investigation of Complaints and a local hearing procedure.

3.2 Meaningful Constitution

The task of maintaining an up-to-date and current Constitution has continued in consultation with the Constitution Review Working Party, especially in the light of recent changes introduced by the Government’s transparency agenda. The Constitution is updated on Council’s website and hard copies issued, once a year.

3.3 Developing Codes and Protocols

A number of Codes and Protocols were reviewed and some new ones approved, most notably the Social Media Guidance for Members and the Media Protocol. The Council will continue to update and review codes and protocols to reflect changes in legislation and best practice, affecting Members and Officers. We will also respond to the changing nature of the Council, to give assurance to Members and the public that legitimate complaints will be resolved, whilst action is more swift to protect Members from frivolous complaints, especially those which relate to social media.

3.4 Monitoring

We keep a watching brief on ethical matters as part of our regular work and we noted that there had been one case of maladministration determined by the Local Government Ombudsman. The Council also determined that it should keep the registers of gifts and hospitality under a review and receives an annual report as a result. Finally, the Monitoring Officer reports any dispensations quarterly to the Committee, informing the Committee of

to whom they were granted, with reasons for the dispensation and the length of the dispensation.

3.5 Adapting to changes brought about by the Pandemic

With the advent of the Coronavirus pandemic, the arrangements for delivering Council services had to be rapidly changed. This included arrangements for the introduction of virtual committee meetings. Alongside this, officers had to develop Procedure rules urgently to take account of this change. I'm pleased to say that those rules are in place and appear to be working well.

4 **Conclusion**

The Council's aim is to continue to develop and maintain a climate of trust and respect in which members, officers and partners work effectively together to deliver the Council' strategic and operational policies. This is done in an honest, objective, transparent, and accountable way to ensure standards are maintained at the highest possible level.

The Audit and Standards Committee complies with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011 and the regulations and guidance provided under that legislation, and continues to play an effective role in achieving this aim. Furthermore, the Officers of the Council additionally ensuring compliance with new laws brought about by the Coronavirus Pandemic.

For further information on issues dealt with by this Annual Report, contact:

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