

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 12 December 2024.

PRESENT: Mrs R Binks (Chairman), Mr A Brady, Mr T Bond, Mr N J D Chard, Mr M A J Hood, Mr C Passmore (Vice-Chairman), Mr O Richardson and Mr M Whiting

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R Gough (Leader of the Council), Mr H Rayner (Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr B Watts (General Counsel), Miss K Reynolds (Governance Advisor), Mr J Betts (Acting Corporate Director Finance), Mr P Oakford (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services), Ms C Head (Head of Finance) Mr J McKay (Acting Chief Accountant), Mr P Dossett (Grant Thornton) Ms Lucy Nutley (Grant Thornton) and Miss R Emberley (Democratic Services)

Mr J Idle (Head of Internal Audit and Counter Fraud) and Ms C Maynard (Head of Commercial and Procurement Division) were in virtual attendance.

### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

#### **255. Introduction/Webcasting**

*(Item 1)*

#### **256. Apologies and Substitutes**

*(Item 2)*

Apologies were given by Mrs Camilla Black, Mr Simon Webb and Dr D Horne.

#### **257. Declarations of Interest in items on the agenda for this meeting**

*(Item 3)*

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **258. Annual Governance Statement**

*(Item 4)*

1. The report was presented by Mr Ben Watts, General Counsel.
2. The key elements of the introduction to the report were as follows:

- a) The Governance Working Party had a report due for discussion at the Selection and Member Services Committee meeting, scheduled for the 13 December 2024.
  - b) The challenges over the past 2 years were recognised within the Statement and the focus was on continuous improvement. The staff survey responses, internal audit work and SEND transport would all be primary areas for concentration in the coming years.
  - c) The Annual Governance Statement had 3 key areas for improvement and actions for the year ahead. All actions would be moved into the individual task tracker on the internal Teams site, so the Committee could monitor the progress.
  - d) The Selection and Member Services and Sub Committees had been working on Member induction and information would be provided via the Governance and Audit Internal Teams site. How the induction takes place will be included.
3. In answer to Members' comments and questions, the following was said:
- a) Auditor from Grant Thornton, Mr Paul Dossett, commented that the Council, in principle, were focusing on the right items. However although progress had been made in relation to Member Governance and Behaviours, there was more work to do and execution needed to be quicker.
  - b) A Member stated that the One Council Approach should be signposted within the budgetary development along with the processes and analyses as this would make it easier to see whether a saving in one area impacted in another. In relation to Compliance of Governance Rules and Framework, it was further stated that it would be helpful to have clear determinations between all the advice given and what choices had been made or the relevant outcomes. Then through Scrutiny, it should be shown whether the outcomes reached, were the right decision.
  - c) The General Counsel commented that one of the reasons why this year's Statement focused on both Member Governance and Behaviour, and, Compliance with Governance Rules and Framework, was due to their broad nature. Members in all Committees had been provided with an opportunity to do 'deep dives' on previous Key Decisions. The General Counsel stated that feedback should be on a continuous cycle and when looking back at prior decisions, it was important that this was done from a perspective of improvement and focus needed to be on how things could be made better in the future. The future Annual Governance Statement is likely to include the testing of effectiveness of Committee decisions.
  - d) The Leader of the Council, Mr Gough, commented that the Executive welcomed reports which highlighted areas for improvement and indicated that the summary contained on page 7 of the Annual Governance Statement summed up the document concisely. He confirmed that the Executive would take the statement on board and recognised the areas where more work was required.

4. Congratulations and thanks were given to the General Counsel by the Members in view of the significant amount of work which had gone into the preparations.
5. RESOLVED that Members agree the Annual Governance Statement.

**259. Other items which the Chairman decides are urgent**  
*(Item 5)*

There were no other items arising.