

COUNCIL
8 December 2021
COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Details of recommendation to Council made by Audit Committee on 1 December

(a) Provision of the External Audit of the Annual Accounts

The Council opted into national auditor appointment arrangements established by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA). These arrangements cover the period from 2018/19 up to and including the audit of the 2022/23 accounts.

All local government bodies need to make important decisions about their external audit arrangements from 2023/24. Audit Committee considered the report of the Director of Corporate Resources, which gave details of the current arrangements and the reasons why they were not satisfactory. The report outlines the three options available to the Council for the procurement of external audit for the next appointing period (2023/24 to 2027/28): to join the PSAA tender process; to tender alone; or to tender with other local authorities.

The committee has been asked to weigh the benefits and risks of these options and were recommended to:

RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL

- i) To decline Public Sector Audit Appointments' invitation to opt into the sector-led option for the appointment of external auditors to principal local government and police bodies for five financial years from 1 April 2023.
- ii) To instruct the officers to seek to establish an independent audit panel and refer the appointment of this Panel back to its February meeting.

REASON

- i) There is a possibility the position with regards to the timeliness of the audit could improve with a local appointment and there appears to be little chance of this in joining the PSAA arrangements.
- ii) If the Council goes alone it must appoint an independent panel and then complete the procurement by 31 December 2022.

COUNCIL
8 December 2021
COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Details of recommendations to Council made by Standards Committee on 1 December

(b) Councillor Code of Conduct – Amendments

In April 2021 Council resolved to adopt the Local Government Association’s Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2020, with minor amendments to the standard text. The LGA has subsequently identified an error and made revisions in relation to Interests. It also considered other feedback and made other amendments to correct and clarify the Code.

A report to the Standards Committee explained these amendments and included a copy of the Council’s current Code with tracked changes. By adopting this revised version, the Council will align itself with the latest version of the LGA Code, without interfering with previous specific amendments already made by this Council.

The Standards Committee were asked to consider these further minor amendments, and were recommended to:

RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL

To adopt the Councillor Code of Conduct for Horsham District Council as amended.

REASON

- i) The Local Government Association Code of Conduct is a national model and now contains additional guidance, working examples and explanatory text. The Horsham District Council Code of Conduct should align as closely as possible with the current version and the up-to-date published model code.
- ii) The Local Government Association have identified an error in relation to the part of the code dealing with interests and have provided some clarity in other areas following feedback. The amendments improve the code and do not interfere with other amendments previously made.

(c) Code of Conduct Complaints – New Procedures

The Standards Committee set up a working group to review the procedures and arrangements in dealing with Standards Code of Conduct complaints.

The working group considered the current procedures and sought ways to improve the process. The proposed changes set out to achieve a more streamlined process for complainants. The revised proposed procedure includes: a 28 day deadline in which to make a complaint unless exceptional circumstances apply; a more prescriptive complaints form to ensure complaints are clearly set out and therefore easier to assess; the requirement to consult with an Independent Person at the assessment stage; and several other measures to ensure an efficient and transparent process.

There has been an increased volume in formal complaints, mainly involving Parish Councillors, and they are often detailed and complex. It is anticipated that the proposed procedure will allow complaint cases to be dealt with more effectively and with less resource implications for the Legal Department.

The Standards Committee have been consulted on the proposed new procedures and were recommended to:

RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL

To approve the adoption of the revised procedure in dealing with Code of Conduct complaints.

REASON

- (i) The current published procedure is detailed within a number of different documents and is repetitive and can be difficult to follow. The revised procedure brings everything together into one simplified clear document.
- (ii) The revised procedure will ensure that the Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer are able to deal with Code of Conduct complaint cases in an efficient, timely, proportionate, just, and transparent way.
- (iii) Best practice recommendations are incorporated within the revised procedure.