

Agenda item 8

AGS/80/20	
Report title: Task and Finish Groups	
Report to: Audit, Governance and Standards Committee	
Report author: Paul Turner, Director, Legal and Assurance	
Date: 28 September 2020	For: Approval
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County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 As part of the effectiveness review undertaken by the Committee in March 2020, the Committee agreed to introduce the facility for it to operate using task and finish groups. This report asks Committee to agree how an action plan following the effectiveness review undertaken in March 2020.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Agree the protocol on the use of task and finish groups as at appendix 1.
- 2.2 Agree to establish a task and finish group to look at the transforming corporate systems programme.

3. Background

- 3.1 As part of the effectiveness review undertaken by the Committee in March 2020, supported by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, the Committee agreed to introduce the facility for it to operate using task and finish groups.
- 3.2 A protocol at appendix 1 has been developed which says At the last meeting of the Committee, it was agreed that we would commission to support the Committee to undertake a review of its effectiveness. This is in line with recommended practice.

- 3.2 Accordingly a CIPFA facilitator sent a questionnaire to all committee members and attended County Hall to interview the Chairman, a member of the committee and a number of ECC officers, including the Executive Director for Corporate and Customer Services, the Section 151 Officer, the Monitoring Officer and the Head of Assurance. He also listened to recordings of the Committee meeting.
- 3.3 On 9 March 2020 a workshop took place facilitated by CIPFA. All members of the committee were invited and eight members attended. Officers were not present as it was agreed that it is important for the committee to say what they want.
- 3.4 As a result of notes taken by the facilitator and the Chairman of agreed actions, an action plan has been produced. This is appended to this report.
- 3.5 If adopted we will see changes to the operation of the committee. Given the number of actions in the plan and that the implementation of some of them will need detailed consideration by the committee, it is proposed to phase in the actions over the next year or so.
- 3.6 One action is that covering reports will include a summary of key points. Key items in the action plan include:
- A pre-meeting before every committee meeting so that members can plan lines of enquiry etc
 - Briefings before each meetings on subjects of interest to the committee
 - An annual skills audit to be undertaken by the committee
 - The addition of a co-opted independent member of the committee
 - An effectiveness review to be undertaken annually
 - Short term working groups to look at particular topics in detail
 - Production of an annual report to council
 - Services which receive a 'no assurance' audit be automatically invited to attend committee and services which receive a 'limited assurance' audit will be considered for invitation by the Chairman
- 3.7 The commitment to undertake further effectiveness reviews provides a basis for the committee to continue to reflect on its own performance and build on and, if necessary, change what is being agreed today. It is important that the committee 'owns' the action plan.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 It is likely that there will be an increased requirement for officer support to the committee but officers believe that this can be met within existing resources.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Audit Committee is a key way in which the Council provides assurance that it is providing value for money and has proper systems of control. Without effective assurance Councillors will not know that the Council is effectively carrying out its statutory duties. Whilst the effectiveness review is not a legal requirement it seems a good idea in order to maximise the investment made by councillors into the work of the Committee.

6. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 6.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 creates the public sector equality duty which requires that when ECC makes decisions it must have regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 6.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation. Equality and diversity matters have been considered in the production of the progress report.

7. List of Appendices

Appendix: Draft action plan

8. List of Background Papers

None.