

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

From: Councillor Suzie Morley, Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Assets & Investments and Cabinet Member for Customers, Digital Transformation & Improvement	Report Number: CMU2
To: Council	Date of meeting: 26 September 2019

TO PROVIDE AN UPDATE ON THE LAW AND GOVERNANCE PORTFOLIO

1. Overview of Portfolio

- 1.1 The Law & Governance group comprises Audit & Risk Management, Democratic Services, Information Management and the Shared Legal Services. The Assistant Director is also the Councils' Monitoring Officer and the section therefore plays a critical role in supporting the work of the MO.
- 1.2 The Law & Governance teams are predominantly support services and contribute to the delivery of the Joint Strategic Plan by providing professional support and advice to all other service areas. The teams have an essential role in maintaining and promoting good governance throughout the organisation.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That Council notes the report.

3. Key Activities/Issues Over the Past Three Months

3.1 Elections

All our District and Parish elections were delivered on Thursday 2nd May 2019, electing members to the newly established wards. The elections were delivered legally and to budget. During the planning for the local elections, confirmation of the European Parliamentary Elections (EPE) was received. Planning and delivery of the EPE resulted in a successful and legal election for the Babergh and Mid Suffolk counting areas on Thursday 23rd May 2019.

During June and July 2019 development has been carried out on the elections management system. All staff employed for the purposes of carrying out election duties have been setup with a self-service staff portal. In future elections this will provide a more efficient method for administering staffing (appointment, training and payment). It will also provide a more secure method for capturing staff details and enable staff to maintain the accuracy of their details to support GDPR compliance.

3.2 **Electoral Registration**

The Annual Canvass of Electors began during week commencing Monday 15th July 2019; the revised register will be published on Sunday 1 December 2019. At the end of week four of canvass (Friday 16th August 2019), the overall response rate was 65.42% for Babergh and 67.91% for Mid Suffolk.

This is a greater response that was anticipated at this stage of canvass. To date 50.34% of respondents for Babergh and 45.25% for Mid Suffolk have used an electronic response method (telephone, online or text message).

3.3 **Land Search Times**

Search times rose briefly to 14 working days for a short period following the transition from Citrix for some of the main applications used by the Land Charges team. However, the team were able to quickly divert resources to return to the target turnaround time of 10 working days.

3.4 **Freedom of Information Training**

The Information Governance Officer has started to roll out a programme of training for officers on responding to requests for information made under the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations. This will ensure that officers have up to date knowledge of how to recognise and respond to requests for information and an understanding of the implications of failing to respond to requests within the statutory timescales. Training for Councillors will be picked up by the Councillor Development Steering Group.

4. **Future Key Activities**

4.1 **Annual Canvass and Publication of the Register of Electors**

The second phase of Annual canvass will commence in Mid Sept 2019 when non-responding properties will be written to for a second time. The second phase write out will be supported by a personal canvass, mobile technology will again be used to enable an efficient and effective personal canvass. The revised register will be published on Sunday 1st December 2019.

4.2 **Neighbourhood Planning Referenda (NPR) and Elections planning**

Electoral services are preparing for the delivery of NPRs during late 2019. Planning and preparation will commence in late Sept 2019 for the planned Police and Crime Commissioner elections on Thursday 7th May 2020. Preparations have been made to ensure readiness for any unplanned elections.

5. **Audit and Governance**

5.1 **Joint Annual Governance Statement**

Internal Audit presented the Joint Annual Governance Statement (AGS) 2018/19 to the Joint Audit and Standards Committee in July 2019. The Joint Audit and Standards Committee has responsibility for being satisfied that the Joint Annual Governance Statement (AGS), to accompany each Council's financial accounts 2018/19, properly reflects the risk environment and any actions required to improve it.

The AGS explains how the Councils have complied with the Local Code and also meets the requirements of Regulation 6 (Part 2) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 in relation to the publication of an Annual Governance Statement. The AGS is required to be published to accompany the published Statement of Accounts. It has been prepared in consultation with key senior officers to reflect the operations of each Council during 2018/19. It provides an assurance of the effectiveness of each Council's system on internal control.

In conclusion, the arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework. There have been no governance issues identified during the year that are considered significant in relation to each Council's overall governance framework. We are already addressing the key governance risks and challenges set out in this Annual Governance Statement and will continue to do so over the coming year to further strengthen our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will continue to address the need for any improvements that are required and that arrangements are in place to monitor the issues raised as part of each Council's annual review.

5.2 Annual Internal Audit Report 2018/19

Internal Audit presented the Internal Audit Report 2018/19 to the Joint Audit and Standards Committee in July 2019. The purpose of this report is to inform Councillors of the work undertaken within the Internal Audit Service for the year 2018/19 and provides them with a review of the variety and scope of projects and corporate activities which are supported through the work of the team.

The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) require the Corporate Manager for Internal Audit to report periodically to senior management and the Joint Audit and Standards Committee on Internal Audit's performance relative to its Internal Audit Plan, including significant risk exposures and control issues where relevant, as well as fraud risks and governance issues.

The Corporate Manager for Internal Audit is responsible for the delivery of an audit opinion and report that can be used by the Councils to inform its governance statement. The annual opinion concludes on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's framework of governance, risk management and control.

In giving this opinion, assurance can never be absolute and therefore, only reasonable assurance can be provided that there are no significant weaknesses in the processes reviewed. In assessing the level of assurance to be given, the Corporate Manager for Internal Audit has based his opinion on:

- Written reports on all internal audits completed during the course of the year, both assurance and consultancy;
- Results of any follow up exercises undertaken in respect of previous years' internal audit work;
- The results of work of other review bodies where appropriate;
- The extent of resources available to deliver the internal audit work; and
- The quality and performance of the internal audit service and the extent of compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS).

Audit Opinion

The Corporate Manager for Internal Audit is satisfied that sufficient assurance work has been carried out to allow him to form a reasonable conclusion on the adequacy and effectiveness of each Council's internal control environment.

It is the Corporate Manager for Internal Audit's opinion that the Councils' framework of governance, risk management and internal control is '(Sufficient) – Reasonable Assurance' – and that the system, process or activity should achieve its objectives safely and effectively. However, whilst there are some control weaknesses most key controls are in place and operating effectively. Where weaknesses have been identified through an internal audit review, Internal Audit have worked with management to agree appropriate corrective actions and a timescale for improvement.

6. Democratic Services

The Members' Induction Day was held on the 8th May 2019 and was a great success. Members had the opportunity to meet members of staff from all service areas and were given a flavour of what each service area did. They were also able to pick up their ID badges and IT equipment. Overall evaluation of the day was excellent.

The Babergh Annual Council meeting was held on the 20th May 2019. Councillor Kathryn Grandon was appointed Chair for the year and her nominated charity for the year is the Hadleigh Dementia Action Alliance. After the annual meeting the Chair presented Members with loyal service awards and long service awards.

The Mid Suffolk Annual Council meeting was held on the 22nd May 2019. Councillor Lavinia Hadingham was appointed Chair for the year and her nominated charity for the year is Homestart. After the annual meeting the Chair presented Members with loyal service awards and long service awards.

Future Activities

The respective teams will continue to support and promote good governance throughout the organisation.

National Democracy Week is due to run from 14th October 2019 -18th October 2019 and relevant activities are being planned.

Chairing Skills training for Members will be held on 1st October 2019.