

SPECIAL AUDIT COMMITTEE

(Remotely via Teams)

Members Present:

15 March 2021

Chairperson: Councillor L.M.Purcell

Councillors: H.C.Clarke, O.S.Davies, S.E.Freeguard,
J.Miller, R.Mizen, S.Renkes, A.J.Richards,
R.L.Taylor, R.W.Wood and A.N.Woolcock

Officers In Attendance: K.Jones, C.Griffiths, H.Jones, A.O'Donnell and
N.Headon

Representing Audit Wales: G.Gillett

1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The following Member made a declaration of interest at the commencement of the meeting.

Councillor O.S.Davies - Re: External Independent Governance Review, as he is a family member. He considered the declaration as prejudicial and left the meeting before the start of the item.

2. GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The Chief Executive thanked Audit Committee for attending at short notice.

The Chief Executive explained that the meeting had been called in order to give assurance regarding actions that had been taken and to give Members an opportunity to ask questions regarding the commissioned review, as detailed in the circulated Terms of Reference (Appendix 1 of the report).

It was noted that the Chief Executive was unable to discuss the case itself as the investigation of the matter was now being dealt with by the Public Services Ombudsman, but would take questions on the Terms of Reference.

Members questioned the communication with the community affected by school reorganisation within the Swansea Valley. The Chief Executive explained that a decision had been taken to delay the issuing of the report and a timetable was currently being put together, when completed this would be reported back to Members and members of the public.

The Chief Executive explained that the review had been commissioned last week and was currently underway. The reviewers were expecting to produce a report by mid-April, but this would be dependent on findings. It was highlighted that investigations were on the current processes and systems that the Council has in place in relation to each of the items in the Terms of Reference.

Members commented that the Chief Executive had acted correctly and the proposed way forward was the correct one.

Members questioned if it would be beneficial to hold a seminar/ training session as a refresher for all Members on current protocols. The Chief Executive agreed that it was something that could be considered. It would be worth waiting for the outcome of the case in order to establish if there were any changes that the reviewers recommended to the Council, although if there were any specific matters Members felt they would like as refresher training session in the near future this would be considered.

A discussion took place regarding individuals undertaking the review. The Chief Executive explained that the review would be led by Rod Alcott who had extensive experience with corporate governance reviews and he would be assisted by Jack Straw. The Chief Executive went on to explain there had been work around the Regional Partnership Board that Jack Straw had been involved with and that he had also worked in a number of authorities. The Chief Executive highlighted that there was no reason to believe it was inappropriate for Jack Straw to be involved in the review, and that he was recommended by the Welsh Local Government Association as someone who would be an appropriate person to support this, but if Members had any concerns to inform the Chief Executive.

Members stated that they were not questioning the professionalism of Jack Straw and were content to support his involvement.

Members questioned whether there was a possibility of a public inquiry. It was noted that a public inquiry was not something that the Council had the power to invoke. That would be a matter for Government. If Members required details on how the process worked they should speak to the Head of Legal Services.

RESOLVED: That the Audit Committee received the Terms of Reference for the external independent review and noted that the report setting out the findings of the review would be presented to the Audit Committee in due course.

CHAIRPERSON