



East Suffolk House, Riduna Park, Station Road,
Melton, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP12 1RT

Audit and Governance Committee

Members:

Councillor Geoff Lynch (Chairman)
Councillor Edward Back (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Judy Cloke
Councillor Tony Cooper
Councillor Linda Coulam
Councillor Tess Gandy
Councillor Chris Mapey
Councillor Rachel Smith-Lyte
Councillor Ed Thompson

Members are invited to a **Meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee** to be held in the Deben Conference Room, East Suffolk House, Melton on **Monday, 2 March 2020 at 6.30pm**

An Agenda is set out below.

Part One – Open to the Public

Pages

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|----------|---|--------------|
| 1 | Apologies for Absence and Substitutions | |
| 2 | Declarations of Interest
Members and Officers are invited to make any declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Local Non-Pecuniary Interests that they may have in relation to items on the Agenda and are also reminded to make any declarations at any stage during the Meeting if it becomes apparent that this may be required when a particular item or issue is considered. | |
| 3 | Minutes
To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 January 2020. | 1 - 7 |

4 Item for Information - Rent Arrears

Further to the reference from the Scrutiny Committee in relation to Rent Arrears, the Audit and Governance Committee is provided with the following update upon Rent Arrears for information only:

East Suffolk Council's rent arrears profile had been steadily increasing since the introduction of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and more specifically Universal Credit going full service in Lowestoft in May 2016. This led to an increase in both the level of arrears and the number of arrears cases. Around the same time, a Rent Officer left the Council and the post was not recruited to, resulting in unrealistic caseloads for the remaining four Rent Officers of around 1300 per week. As such, the Housing Service did not have sufficient capacity to manage the workload.

The Service has taken a number of steps to address this position, which was unsustainable.

Most significantly, the Service invested in RentSense, the Council's first predictive analytical software. This runs alongside our Orchard housing management system and uses algorithms to predict which rent accounts need attention. As a result, Rent Officers work with a much reduced and accurately targeted caseload. They are now typically achieving a case completion rate of over 95% per week and are working towards 100%. We went live with this software in February 2019, and have seen a reduction in our rent arrears for the first three quarters in 2019/20 as a result. No reduction in arrears had been achieved for at least the previous five years. We are currently seeing lower rent arrears totals week on week than for nearly three years, which is an incredible achievement in the current climate.

Furthermore, in 2018 we employed a Financial Inclusion Officer who works with our tenants to maximise their income, and assist them with their Universal Credit claims. This ensures our most vulnerable tenants are supported. Tenants are also referred for debt advice where relevant to help them reduce their outgoings.

The Service has an action plan which it is working through to continue to deliver reduced rent arrears, and this also includes actions to mitigate the impact of future reforms such as managed migration of the remaining Housing Benefit claimants over to Universal Credit which is due for completion by 2023.

It should also be noted that at the start of 2019/20, in consultation with Councillor Richard Kerry, the rent arrears targets were revised. It was recognised that the previous targets were unachievable post Universal Credit and failing to achieve these unrealistic targets was demotivating Rent Officers. As such, our targets have been revised to more closely align with the sector's performance nationally, which recognises that maintaining existing arrears levels is the new upper quartile performance.

5 Audit and Governance Committee's Work Programme

To consider the Committee's Work Programme for the remainder of the 2019/20 Municipal Year.

6 Exempt/Confidential Items

It is recommended that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Part Two – Exempt/Confidential

Pages

7 Exempt Minutes

- Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

8 Internal Audit: Data Protection Status Update

- Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

9 Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) Compliance - External Assessment

- Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

10 Internal Audit Reports Recently Issued

- Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

Close

Stephen Baker, Chief Executive

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