

## Farms Audit Update

To: Audit & Accounts Committee

Meeting Date: 13 July 2021

From: Chief Executive and Director of Law and Governance

Electoral division(s): All

Forward Plan ref: Not applicable

Key decision: No

Outcome: To provide an update on the actions arising from the Manor Farm Audit and give assurance that appropriate all actions have been taken.

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to note the progress of actions which arise from the Farm's Audit

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## 1. Background and History

1.1 The Manor Farm Audit and its recommendations were considered by this Committee on three occasions, 5 March 2021, 23 March 2021 and 26 March 2021.

1.2 In summary the following occurred at each of the Committees:

**5 March 2021** – The Committee determined that the section of the Mazars report on the County Farm Service process and procedures and the 31 recommendations in the relevant audit should be made public and considered first by the Committee as these sections did not contain exempt information. The Committee adjourned for those sections to be made public and the committee debated in detail all of those recommendations and made comments, amendments and recommendations accordingly. The Committee then resolved to consider the remainder of the reports in private concerning specific tenancy issues, code of conduct and disciplinary issues as this information was considered to be exempt and the Committee considered, on the basis of the legal advice that they had received that these matters should not be considered in public.

**23 March 2021** – An update on 31 recommendations was presented by the Assistant Director: Property and the Committee resolved to note the progress of actions which arise from the part of the Manor Farm Audit which related to the Farms service.

**26 March 2021** – The Committee resolved to make a confidential progress report available for public consideration. As there are a number of new members of the committee a copy of this report is attached to this report for each Committee member to consider (Appendix 1).

## 2. Update on actions

2.1 Attached to this report is an update on the 31 recommendations which arise from the audit in relation to the Farm's Service (Appendix 2). The Assistant Director: Property will attend the meeting to present this update and answer any questions on it.

2.2 As stated in the report to this committee on 26 March 2021, the Respect@Work policy has been reviewed and updated with input from members of our Equality and Diversity group and also our recognised trade unions. It now has a greater emphasis on discrimination and now includes information for members of staff how on to address concerns with a third party such as a partner, contractor or elected member. The revised policy has been published and will shortly be relaunched with a communication campaign to raise the profile both of the policy and of the Council's stance that we should all feel comfortable to carry out our roles in a respectful and supportive working environment. Furthermore, that we all have a part to play in establishing and maintaining a culture of respect at all levels of our organisation. This culture underpins employee wellbeing and is crucial to enable us all to do our best work. We have issued a staff engagement

survey specifically focused on staff's experience of respect at work, including interactions from members, which closed on 2 July and we are currently analysing the results. This will feed into an action which we will publish to our staff before the end of July 2021.

- 2.3 Our policies in relation to Violence and Aggression at work are currently under review. What has become apparent is that there is clear guidance in place for circumstances where serious incidents arise, but realistically most people are more likely to experience something that falls short of what we might typically determine an act of violence or aggression, but which nevertheless can still have a significant impact on health and wellbeing. In some cases, this might be discriminatory behaviour from service users or customers, or might be repetitive acts of harassment. Work is underway to create a single source of information for people to access on Camweb that shows them which policy or process to use, depending on what they have experienced and where, and appropriate sources of support in each case. It is anticipated that this will be complete by end of July 2021. It is then planned to take the Respect@Work Policy and this policy to a meeting of Staffing and Appeals Committee in September 2021.
- 2.4 The Council's Whistleblowing Policy has been updated and, following discussion at JMT, will be presented to our recognised trade unions for consultation on 15th July. The revised policy will be presented to this Committee for approval, subject to the consultation with our recognised Trade Unions on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2021. The updated policy is more concise; provides clarity on the type of disclosures that are protected by law; specifies the type of concerns that can be raised under the Whistleblowing Policy; and contains clear signposting to other Council policies that may be used to raise specific concerns.
- 2.5 A virtual training session on the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for all newly elected councillors, alongside returning councillors, took place on Friday 18 May 2021 run by Simon Goacher, Local Government partner at Weightmans solicitors. The training included guidance on conflicts of interests and the Member Officer protocol, along with bias and predetermination and members worked through a number of case studies in small groups. The training was very well attended on the day and video recorded so members who were not able to attend could watch at another time alongside the training notes. All members who were not able to attend were asked to watch the session as soon as possible and Democratic Services is compiling a training record which will be reported back to Constitution and Ethics Committee with the aim of ensuring all members of council have participated.
- 2.6 A Conflict of Interest Policy for members has been drafted and will go to the Constitution and Ethics Committee for consideration on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2021. It is proposed that the policy will form an appendix to the Member Code of Conduct. This draft Conflict of Interest Policy is attached at Appendix 3 to this report for Members' comments, prior to consideration at Constitution and Ethics Committee.

2.7 A report on the Mazars recommendations regarding potential actions in respect of code of conduct issues will be considered at the next meeting of the Constitution and Ethics Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

#### Appendices:

Appendix 1: Report that was published following Audit & Accounts Committee meeting on 26/03/21

Appendix 2: Updated County Farms Audit Management Action Plan

Appendix 3: Draft Conflict of Interest guidance

#### Source documents:

[Hyperlink to previous Audit & Accounts Committee papers](#)