

QS2

Background--

The following extracts from the 'Review of Governance Arrangements for Bristol City Council's Subsidiaries' relate to the ability of members of the Audit Committee to discharge their responsibilities effectively:

Concerns have been raised relating to access to confidential information, because a proportion of papers were viewed to be commercially sensitive and, as such, could not be easily viewed. This has since been discussed by the Audit Committee and a response provided by the Monitoring Officer as to the legal basis on which the Audit Committee have access to information.

In order to discharge their responsibilities, the Audit Committee should have sight of issues relating to the Council's governance arrangements. We recognise that information which is commercially sensitive cannot be publicly available and access needs to be restricted, but the Council needs to find a way to balance the legal and commercial sensitivities to enable Audit Committee to operate effectively.

Recommendation 9: The Council should develop a mechanism to enable the Audit Committee to be sighted on potential exempt issues within their role and responsibilities and legal duties.

Management response

In the Access to Information report presented to the November 2020 Audit Committee, it was acknowledged that the Audit Committee has a responsibility to ensure that key representations to the external auditors as part of the external audit are accurate and complete in line with ISA260 and other standards. The Audit Committee should be able to access such information, including exempt information, that is reasonably necessary for them to discharge this duty. The report also provided the Audit Committee with an overview of the legal framework relating to access to information by Members of the Council, including access to exempt information.

We will continue to ensure that Audit Committee have the ability to see exempt information which is reasonably necessary for them to carry out their legal duties.

Responsible Officer - Director: Legal & Democratic Services

Timing – Ongoing

Question

I may have misunderstood but the Management response to concerns about access to information seems to 'push back' on the Grant Thornton recommendation and implies the Audit Committee will continue to be given the same access to information as was previously considered necessary by the Monitoring Officer.

So, my question is: **What specific changes have been made, in the light of the Bristol Energy experience, to balance the legal and commercial sensitivities and enable Audit Committee to operate effectively?**

A:

The management response confirms that part of the Committee's assurance role is the responsibility to ensure that key representations to the external auditors as part of the external

audit are accurate and complete in line with ISA260 and other standards, and that the Audit Committee should be able to access such information, including exempt information, which is reasonably necessary for them to discharge this duty.