

AGENDA ITEM:

**REPORT TO AUDIT &
GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

**REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF
THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE
COMMITTEE**

29th NOVEMBER 2021

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

SUMMARY

This report is to inform members of the work of the Audit and Governance Committee during the period 1st October 2020 to 30th September 2021.

Introduction

This Annual Report produced by the Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee has been prepared in accordance with the "Audit Committees, Practical Guidance for Local Authorities" produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in 2018.

The report demonstrates how the Audit and Governance Committee has fulfilled its key functions and how it is fully committed to helping to improve the Council's governance and control environments.

The Guidance defines the purpose of an Audit and Governance Committee as follows:

- Audit & Governance Committees are a key component of an authority's governance framework. Their function is to provide an independent and high level resource to support good governance and strong public financial management.
- The purpose of and Audit and Governance Committee is to provide to those charged with governance independent assurance on the adequacy of the risk management framework, the internal control environment and the integrity of the financial reporting and annual governance processes. By overseeing internal and external audit it makes an important contribution to ensuring that effective assurance arrangements are in place.

Functions of the Audit and Governance Committee

The Committee's activities during the period were designed to make a positive contribution to the continual improvement of governance arrangements across the Council, as well as performing the key functions as identified in the Constitution. The Audit and Governance Committee as identified in the constitution is required to:

- a) monitor the integrity of the Council's financial statements and approve the Statement of Accounts;
- b) approve the Annual Governance Statement;

- c) oversee risk management and the Council's risk registers;
- d) review any proposed changes to accounting policies and procedure rules;
- e) consider budget reports and the effect of government announcements on the Council's finances;
- f) review Financial Update reports identifying the impact on the Medium Term Financial Plan and Treasury Management Strategy;
- g) approve the role and responsibilities of the Internal Audit Service (the Services' functions, aims and objectives);
- h) receive and consider the Annual Audit Letter from the Council's External Auditor;
- i) agree the programme of value for money work;
- j) approve the internal and external audit plans;
- k) review Internal Audit work on a quarterly basis; internal and external annual reports together with any management response and receive details of specific significant issues highlighted via audit work and refer to the Executive Scrutiny Committee; the Select Committees; Cabinet or Council, as appropriate, any issues arising which are key in nature;
- l) maintain an overview of the Council's Constitution in respect of contract procedure rules, financial regulations and codes of conduct and behaviour, and consider the Council's compliance with its own and other published standards and controls; and
- m) Considered details of any key ethical and wider corporate governance issues which may be referred to it.

Audit and Governance Committee Membership

The membership of the Audit and Governance Committee is as follows;

Cllr Barry Woodhouse (Chairman),
Cllr Lauriane Povey (Vice-Chair),
Cllr Chris Barlow,
Cllr Stefan Houghton,
Cllr Mick Stoker,
Cllr Eileen Johnson,
Cllr Ross Patterson
Cllr Laura Tunney
Cllr Hugo Stratton

The Audit Committee and the Audit and Governance Committee met 6 times during the reporting period, November 2020, January 2021, February 2021, June 2021 July 2021 and September 2021. The November, January and February meetings taking place across the Teams platform.

Officers

The Audit and Governance Committee continues to be well supported by Officers, providing reports in accordance with the Committee's work programme. During the reporting period the Director of Finance, Development and Business Services, Chief Accountant, Procurement and Governance Manager, Audit and Risk Manager and Health and Safety Manager routinely provided reports and attended the meetings.

External Audit

When required the External Auditors, Mazars, have also attended the Audit and Governance Committee meetings.

Core Activity

The Committee's work and outcomes in each of its areas of responsibility are summarised in the following subsections.

Internal Audit

The Audit and Governance Committee:

- Approved Internal Audit's Audit Plans;
- Approved the Internal Audit Charter;
- Considered regular reports produced by the Audit and Risk Manager highlighting progress against the audit plan and performance against key indicators and any significant issues arising during the period.
- Received and approved the annual report of the Audit and Risk Manager as required by the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). The report included the Audit & Risk Manager's annual opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's internal control and governance processes. It is his opinion that the Council continues to have an appropriate, and overall, an effective system of internal control, upon which it can place reasonable reliance to deliver the Council's objectives, and detect fraud and other malpractice within a reasonable period of time.

External Audit

The Audit and Governance Committee:

- Received regular reports from Mazars with updates on progress in delivering their responsibilities as our external auditor.
- Received the Audit Strategy Memorandum for the year ending 31 March 2021. The purpose of this document was to summarise Mazars audit approach, highlight significant audit risks and areas of key judgements and to provide the Council with the details of their audit team and fees.
- Received the Annual Audit Letter for 2019/20 which summarised the auditor's findings from the 2019/2020 audit. Mazars LLP has issued an unqualified audit opinion on the Council's and Group financial statements for 2019/2020 and in their opinion they;
 - give a true and fair view of the Council and Group's financial position as at 31 March 2020 and of the Councils and Groups expenditure and income for the year then ended; and
 - have been prepared properly in accordance with the CIPFA / LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2019/2020.
- Received the Audit Completion Report Follow Up Letter which covered any issues that had been identified and resolved from the 2019/20 audit of the accounts.

Annual Statement of Accounts

The Audit and Governance Committee:

- Approved the Annual Financial Statements for 2019/20.
- Received and reviewed the draft Annual Statement of Accounts for the 2020/21 financial year within the statutory timescales. Please note statutory deadlines were extended due to Covid 19. Final accounts are due to the Committee by the revised statutory deadline of the 30th September 2021. Unfortunately, due to

issues with the Pension fund figures the annual accounts could not be finalised and presented within the statutory timescales.

Treasury Management

The Audit and Governance Committee:

- Received a 2020/21 mid-term report on the performance against the treasury management and prudential indicators set in the Treasury Management Strategy approved by Council in February 2020.
- Received the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2020/21 that informed members of the performance against treasury management and prudential indicators set in the Treasury Management Strategy approved by Council in February 2020.

Risk Management

The Audit and Governance Committee:

- Received quarterly reports from the Audit and Risk Manager on developments within the Corporate Risk Registers to ensure the Members were aware of any emerging risks across the Council and the extent to which the Strategic Risk Management Strategy was being embedded.
- Considered and challenged the Corporate Strategic Risk Register.

Governance

The Audit and Governance Committee:

- Received the Council's draft Annual Governance Statement for 2020/21 for consideration and comments.
- Approved the Annual Governance Statement for 2020/21.

Health and Safety

The Audit and Governance Committee:

- Received quarterly reports detailing the regular non-responsive services provided by the Council's Health and Safety Unit to monitor, improve and to ensure compliance of the health, safety and well-being control environment.

Chairman's Conclusion

The members of the Committee have shown a strong commitment to the work for which they have been given responsibility and the committee has functioned well. The members have studied agendas and asked searching questions of officers not only presenting reports but also requesting further investigation of issues and explanation by the Chair and supporting officers of the committee.

While recognising the valuable contribution made by members of the Committee also Councillor Perry and ex Councillor Clough who were members previously we must also pay tribute to the officers of this Authority who despite reduced staffing, reorganisation and a harsh financial environment have worked diligently to ensure sound fiscal controls and compliance with relevant regulations. All of this in the most challenging circumstances through Covid 19 with the enforced separation from colleagues and their much needed support. In conclusion I would add that our officers have worked both from home and if necessary in the office throughout the pandemic showing a commitment and dedication to

the Borough's sound financial management under at times extreme pressure and for this effort we must record our gratitude as a committee and a Council.

The Audit and Governance Committee is established with comprehensive terms of reference. The Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee has prepared this annual report on the Committee's work for presentation to Cabinet and hopefully this shows that effective corporate and ethical governance is critical to an authority's performance and in demonstrating continuous improvement it is therefore, a fundamental element of the modernisation agenda. Probity and high standards are an inherent part of corporate/ethical governance.

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