

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

A meeting of Audit and Governance Committee was held on Thursday 27 June 2024.

Present: Cllr Barry Woodhouse (Chair), Cllr Stefan Houghton (Vice-Chair), Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Susan Scott and Cllr Emily Tate.

Officers: Andy Bryson and Suzanne Lloyd.

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr Mick Stoker and Cllr Katie Weston.

AGC/14/24 Evacuation Procedure

The Evacuation Procedure was noted.

AGC/15/24 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

AGC/16/24 Annual Statement of Accounts 2023/24

Officers presented members with the Council's (and Group) Draft Statement of Accounts 2023/2024 which outlined the following:

The Council was required by law to produce a detailed Statement of Financial Accounts, which provided information to all stakeholders. The Statement explained in detail how the Council used its resources and, the net value of the Council (in terms of its assets, liabilities, and reserves).

The accounts had been completed in accordance with the "Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/2024" which was prepared under International Financial Reporting Standards.

The Accounts and Audit Regulations (England) 2015 came into effect on 1st April 2015. The regulations changed the arrangements for the approval and publication of the Statement of Accounts and the Annual Governance Statement. The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 - Regulation 15, as amended by The Accounts and Audit (Amendment) Regulations 2021 required the council to publish the unaudited Statement of Accounts for the financial year ending 31 March 2024 by 31 May 2024.

The Council were unable to achieve this deadline due to delays in the receipt of pension fund information for the period ending March 2024.

For the Publication of the unaudited statement of accounts, the requirement in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (as amended) was for the public inspection period to be commenced by 1 June. However, this commencement could only happen at the earliest the first working day after the unaudited accounts (and other specified documents) were published.

If publication was not possible by these dates, then in England the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, as amended, would require the following actions:

For the unaudited statement of accounts, as soon as reasonably practicable, publish a notice stating that the authority had not been able to commence the period for the exercise of public rights and the reasons for this. The public inspection period must then be commenced as soon as reasonably practicable. This notice with the relevant explanation for the delay was posted on the Councils website on the 31st May 2024.

Based on the updated regulations it was the intention that following this meeting the period in which electors had the right to examine the accounts, question the auditor and to make objections at audit would be set. This was a period of 30 working days which would commence on 1st July and end on 9th August 2024.

The Accounts and Audit Regulations (Amendment 2022) were laid before Parliament on the 28th June 2022. These amendments changed the deadline for Authorities to publish their statement of accounts and supporting documents (together with any certificate or opinion of the local auditor) from 31st July to 30th September for the financial years beginning in 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026 and 2027.

The Chief Accountant presented the Statement of Accounts to the Audit and Governance Committee and highlighted the following:

- The challenging time Officers had faced preparing the accounts due to further pension issues impacting figures within the report which resulted in the pension asset being reduced to zero.
- Key Financial figures
- Movement in Reserves Statement
- Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement
- Balance Sheet
- Cash Flow Statement
- Notes to the Core Financial Statements
- Collection Fund
- Group Accounts including:
 - Group Movement in Reserves Statement
 - Group Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement
 - Group Balance Sheet
 - Group Cash Flow Statement
 - Group Notes

- Statement of Responsibilities/Approval for the Statement of Accounts

Brief discussion was had around the reporting of individual members allowances. Officers confirmed that individual allowances were published onto the Councils website via Democratic Services however the overall figure was reported in the Statement of accounts, and it was highlighted that this was £2000 less than the previous financial year.

Clarity was given in terms of under expenditure relating to the private housing sector.

Discussion was had around the increase in costs associated with Childrens Services.

The Chief Accountant offered Members the opportunity to go through the Councils accounts in a separate session as a group or on an individual basis, and to contact him directly should they wish to do so.

AGREED that:

1) the report be noted and

2) the Committee also note the arrangements for the public inspection and external audit of the Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 (Para 7 contained within the main report).

AGC/17/24 Forward Plan 2024/25

The Forward Plan as noted.