Audit and Governance Committee

A meeting of Audit and Governance Committee was held on Monday 29th June 2026.

Present: Cllr Barry Woodhouse (Chair), Cllr Stefan Houghton (Vice-Chair), Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mohammed Mazi, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Mick Stoker and Cllr Marcus Vickers

Officers: Andy Bryson, Andrew Barber James Collins (Forvis-Mazars) and John Devine

Also in attendance: NA

Apologies: NA

AGC/1/26 Evacuation Procedure

The Evacuation Procedure was noted by Members.

AGC/2/26 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

AGC/3/26 Minutes

The minutes of the last meetings held on Monday 23rd February 2026 were agreed as a true record.

AGC/4/26 Risk Register Management Report Update

Members were presented with the Risk Management Update report, the purpose of the report was to inform members of the current status of the Council's strategic risks. The strategic risk registers primarily focussed on the achievement of objectives over the longer-term and could take a number of years to materialise.

Assessment was based on information currently available and was used to evaluate the potential for future risk and as such would be regularly reviewed as more information became available. The assessment of the risk should not be used as an indication of current performance it was just one element considered as part of the wider assessment of risks, other examples included financial certainty or potential changes that may be outside of the Councils control.

Officers highlighted that there were three risk areas with a red status they were as follows:

- Risk of not supporting children with disabilities and special educational needs to maximise their potential and understand future demands. The primary cause of the change was a number of processes and procedural issues identified during the Ombudsman's investigation of a complaint and the high cost of placements. A full review of processes was being undertaken as part of actions agreed with the Ombudsman.

- Risk of failure to effectively deliver services within agreed budget and to maintain a balanced MTFP. Although some good progress had been made in reducing the MTFP gap as a result of positive outcomes from the Powering our Future programme, the future budget gap remained.

- Risk of supporting children in our care to achieve appropriate outcomes in care. This risk has increased from Amber to Red, primarily due to the costs of placing children exceeding the budget provision in the MTFP.

Members thanks Officers for the report and AGREED to note the update.

AGC/5/26 Health & Safety Report

The Health & Safety Report provided an update to Members on the e health, safety and wellbeing performance of the Council for the period 1 January 2026 – 31 May 2026. Officers highlighted the new layout of the report to Members; this had been done to make the data more easily understandable.

The main areas of concern were highlighted to members, the issue around Fire Risk was a long standing one which members were aware of from previous updates. It had occurred due a change in regulations, the Authority had completed the necessary inspections on those high-risk building since the last update. Two members of staff had also started training to enable the authority to complete all outstanding inspections.

Another section that was highlighted to members was the slight increase in the number of recorded accidents, there was no single reasons outlined in the report, but Officers believed that it linked to the new system being easier to report on.

Members supported that training of staff to undertake the Fire Risk inspections in future.

Members AGREED to note the report.

AGC/6/26 Internal Audit Annual Report

The Internal Audit Annual Report was presented to the Committee as required by the Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS). 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. As such it formed an integral part of the formulation of the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

This report encompassed the reporting requirements specified in Standard 2060 & 2450 of the GIAS.

The report showed the current position in respect to progress against the 2025/26 planned work and the results of said work that had been undertaken. The Audit opinion had been prepared on the completed testing to date, and Officers were satisfied sufficient work had been completed to support an overall opinion to be given.

Officers also stated that they were satisfied that they had sufficient resources to support the planned audit work for the next 12 months.

Members AGREED to note the report.

AGC/7/26 Draft Annual Governance Statement

Members were presented with the Draft Annual Governance Statement. The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require all authorities in England to conduct a review at least once a year of the effectiveness of its governance framework and produce an Annual Governance Statement to accompany its Statement of Accounts. The deadline for completion of the draft Statement of Accounts for 2025/26 is 31 January 2027 at which point they are subject to the external audit process.

The final Annual Governance Statement would be presented for approval by the Audit & Governance Committee alongside the Audited Statement of Accounts.

AGREED that the draft Annual Governance Statement for 2025/2026 be endorsed.

AGC/8/26 Draft Annual Statements of Accounts 2025/2026

Members received the Council's Draft Statement of Accounts for the financial year ending 31 March 2026.

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 2025/2026" 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 2026 by 30 June 2026.

The audited accounts deadlines for England were subject to backstop dates brought in to deal with the backlog of local audits. For the 2025/26 this date had been set as the 31st January 2027.

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 July. However, this commencement can only happen at the earliest the first working day after the unaudited accounts (and other specified documents) were published.

Based on the updated regulations it was the intention that following this meeting the period in which electors and interested persons have the right to examine the accounts, question the auditor and to make objections at audit would be set. This would be a period of 30 working days which will commence on 1st July and will end on 11th August 2026.

AGREED that the financial information and unaudited Statement of Accounts 2025/26 be noted, including the arrangements for public inspection and external audit.

AGC/9/26 External Audit Certificate Update 24/25

Officers from Forvis-Mazars explained to members that when the Accounts for 2024/2025 were signed off they had been unable to sign off the Audit Certificate. Forvis-Mazars had waiting for confirmation from the National Audit Office which had been received prior to this meeting, this would now enable them to sign off the Audit Certificate in the following weeks. There were no concerns to bring to members attention, only the update on the certificate sign off.

Members AGREED to note the update.

AGC/10/26 External Audit Strategy Memorandum 25/26

Members were taken through the External Audit Strategy Memorandum 2025/26 by Forvis-Mazars Officers, the report provided an overview of the planned scope and timing of the external audit, including the significant and enhanced audit risks Forvis-Mazars had identified. In addition, as it was a fundamental requirement that Forvis-Mazar were, and had been seen to be, independent of the Council this report also summarised Forvis-Mazars considerations and conclusions on their independence.

Officers took Members through the Audit scope, approach and timeline section of the report. It outlined the planning and risk assessment portion of the audit had begun in April/June 2026, with fieldwork being completed in July – October 2026. The next section was communication in October/November 2026 which would be when Forvis-Mazars would progress any issues that had arisen or share any identified significant weaknesses if not already highlighted. The completion section of the timetable was given as December/January 2027 but that was dependant on getting the pension fund assurance on time.

The Value for Money section of the report touched on the financial sustainability in Adult and Children's services. Forvis-Mazars had raised this in their 2024/2025 Auditors Annual Report highlighting the ongoing pressures and need to manage the 2025/26 with the revised MTFP. The Councils Powering Out Future Programme had already identified significant opportunities to deliver services in a more efficient manner which could deliver up to £9.9m in savings.

Members acknowledged the nation-wide strain on Adult and Children's services and supported the Councils actions to adhere to the revised MTFP.

AGREED to note the report.

AGC/11/26 Any Other Business

There was no other business to bring to the Committees attention.

AGC/12/26 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Members AGREED that under Section 100A of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press & public were excluded from the meeting on the grounds that it is likely to discuss exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of the Act.

AGC/13/26 Internal Annual Report Supplementary Work Appendix

This item was restricted due to information relating to the financial or business affairs of the Authority by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Chair: .....