

**Minutes of a meeting of Audit Committee
held on Tuesday, 19th March, 2024
from 7.00 pm**

Present: S Hicks (Chairman)
R Bates (Vice-Chair)
R Clarke

Absent: Councillors J Belsey, L Carvalho, C Cherry and M Cornish

1. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies were received from Councillors J Belsey, Cherry, Carvalho, and Cornish.

2. TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS IN RESPECT OF ANY MATTER ON THE AGENDA.

None.

3. TO BE AGREED BY GENERAL AFFIRMATION THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 28 NOVEMBER 2023.

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2023 and they were signed by the Chairman.

4. TO CONSIDER ANY ITEMS THAT THE CHAIRMAN AGREES TO TAKE AS URGENT BUSINESS.

None.

5. EXTERNAL AUDIT - FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2022/23.

Louise Duffield, Director of Resources and Organisational Development introduced the item noting it sets the national position faced by the Audit sector and the actions being taken to address the issues. It was noted that the Council is only affected in relation to one year of Audits compared to other local authorities who have a larger number of backlogged accounts.

Kevin Suter, and Katie Lean, EY presented their interim Value For Money (VFM) report. Risk assessments carried out as part of this work did not identify any significant weaknesses and they are satisfied that the Council has proper arrangements in place. Discussion was also held on the role of benchmarking of other Local Authorities in the VFM report.

Members discussed the outcome of the Government consultation which has concluded after a period of 4 weeks. Kevin Suter confirmed that it may require

legislation to be taken before Parliament which could potentially come into force by June, allowing Auditors from July to September to complete audits before the 30 September backstop date. The deadline date is in order to complete the backlog and any audits not completed by that time will have an explanation provided and will be stopped, in order to move on.

With regards to the 22/23 Audit, EY have not begun this. Due to the timescales set out above, it was considered to be a waste of resources and money to start the process if they are unable to conclude it by the deadline. The intention is to move straight to the 23/24 set of accounts.

The Chairman took Members to a vote on the recommendations, which were agreed with 3 in favour.

RESOLVED

The Committee:

- i. Agreed the Value for Money Report;
- ii. Noted the trajectory for the External Audit situation nationally and the impact for Local Authorities.

[EY representatives left the meeting at 7.13pm]

6. INTERNAL AUDIT STRATEGY AND PROPOSED OPERATIONAL PLAN 2024/25.

The Director introduced the report, noting that the work is carried out in conjunction with Mazars to present a balanced programme of audits across the year. Mazars will attend the next Audit Committee to present a look back over the past audit year.

It was confirmed that there are appropriate levels of resources within Mazars to carry out this programme of audits. Discussion was also held on the focus of audits relating to cyber-attacks and security breaches.

The Chairman took Members to a vote on the recommendations, which were agreed with 3 in favour.

RESOLVED

The Committee commented on the detailed Internal Audit Plan for 2024/24.

7. STRATEGIC RISKS 2024/25.

The Director introduced the report, noting that the risks were reviewed as part of the recent budget setting process.

Clarification was provided around the difference between initial and revised risk. Discussion was also held on the way in which business continuity plans often form key mitigations to the risks.

The Chairman took Members to a vote on the recommendations, which were agreed with 3 in favour.

RESOLVED

The Committee considered and endorsed the Strategic Risks for 2024-25 and management plans set out at Appendix A and provided feedback it deems appropriate to Cabinet.

8. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2023/24.

The Director introduced the report for the year closing in March 2024, confirming that it is the S151 Officers formal note is a statutory document, signed and endorsed by both the Head of Paid Service and the Leader.

The Chairman took Members to a vote on the recommendations, which were agreed with 3 in favour.

RESOLVED

The Committee considered and approved the AGS for inclusion in the Statement of Accounts 2023/24.

9. AUDIT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24.

Louise Duffield introduced the report noting that this meeting is the last Committee of the municipal year. A paper is being presented to Council on 27 March 2024 setting out the draft Programme of Meetings for the year ahead which will allow planning to commence on the Audit Committee's next work programme. Mazar's review of the past year of audits is scheduled for the next meeting of this Committee.

The Chairman took Members to a vote on the recommendation which was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the contents of the report and approve the Work Programme as set out.

10. QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.2 DUE NOTICE OF WHICH HAS BEEN GIVEN.

None.

The meeting finished at 7.19 pm

Chairman