

Minutes of Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

**Thursday, 23 November 2023 at 6.00 pm
at Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Preece (Chair);
Councillors Bhullar, Smith, Tipper and
Mr Ager (Independent Vice-Chair).

In attendance: Brendon Arnold – Interim Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer, Peter Farrow – Audit Services and Risk Management Manager, Kate Ashley – Strategic Lead Service Improvement, Mike Jones – Assistant Director Legal and Assurance and Deputy Monitoring Officer, Luke Dove – Assistant Director- Assets, Phil Kingston – Principal Lead Energy and Climate Change, Trisha Newton – Deputy Democratic Services Manager and Johane Gandiwa – Committee and Constitutional Services Lead Officer.

48/23 Apologies for Absence

An apology was received from Councillor L Giles.

49/23 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

50/23 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.



51/23 Additional Items of Business

There were no urgent additional items of business.

52/23 Strategic Risk Register

The Committee received an update on specific risks. Since the last review, the previous risks around the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Allocation, Future Government Policies and Funding Sources and Inflation had been absorbed into one wider Medium Term Financial Strategy, Central Government Funding and Resource Allocation risk, and a new risk had been added regarding the completion of the council's Statement of Accounts.

The full Strategic Risk register would be reported to the next meeting of the committee.

53/23 Public Health Directorate Risk Register

The Committee received an update on the Public Health Directorate Risk Register.

In response to a question around public health threats and how these were interpreted at a local level and with regards to recruitment levels within the team, officers undertook to establish process and feed the response back.

54/23 Internal Audit Progress Report

The Committee received an update on the Internal Audit Progress Report which contained details of the matters arising from internal audit work undertaken between April and October 2023. The report highlighted two limited assurance reports on Climate Change and the Use of Council Procurement Cards.

An update was provided by officers on the Climate Change Action Plan progress. It was anticipated that further updates would be provided as progress was made.

With regards to the use of Council Procurement Cards, the Committee was updated on the recent review and arrangements put in place to ensure compliance with the policy.

The Chair wished to place on record his thanks for the work undertaken in relation to the use of procurement cards and the rapid improvements made to ensure compliance in this area.

55/23 Internal Audit Charter

The Committee considered the Internal Audit Charter.

Resolved that the Internal Audit Charter is approved.

56/23 Code of Corporate Governance

The Committee considered the revised Code of Corporate Governance.

The Council adopted the Local Code of Corporate Governance as a mechanism to demonstrate that its governance structures complied with the principles contained in the framework. The Code was a key component of the Council's governance arrangements and described the processes and arrangements that the Council had in place to evidence compliance with good governance principles.

Resolved that Full Council is recommended to approve the updated Code of Corporate Governance.

57/23 Work Programme for the 2023/24 Municipal Year

The Committee reviewed the work programme for the current municipal year.

58/23 Cabinet Forward Plan

The Committee noted the items contained in the Cabinet Forward Plan.

59/23 Improvement Plan Progress Report

The Committee received the quarterly update on progress against the Improvement Plan agreed by Council.

The Improvement Plan incorporated all recommendations from the Grant Thornton Governance Review, the LGA (Local Government Association) Corporate Peer Challenge and the CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) Financial Management Review, as well as the Statutory Directions from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Resolved that the public and press is excluded from the rest of the meeting. This is to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, relating to any individual, likely to reveal the identity of an individual or the financial and business affairs of any person, including the authority holding that information.

The Chief Executive provided an update to the Committee on the recently approved management structure and the proposed plan to appoint to positions and the next steps.

The Committee noted the submissions by the Chief Executive.

Meeting ended at 7.42pm

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