

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Audit and Governance Board held on Wednesday, 5 July 2023 at the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Polhill (Chair), Wall (Vice-Chair), Abbott, Begg, Bevan, Dourley, McDermott, N. Plumpton Walsh and Wallace

Apologies for Absence: Councillors J. Bradshaw and Gilligan

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: E. Dawson, M. Murphy and G. Ferguson

Also in attendance: Mr M Green – Grant Thornton

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

		<i>Action</i>
AGB1	MINUTES	
	<p>The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2023 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.</p>	
AGB2	INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT & OPINION 2022/23	
	<p>The Board considered a report of the Divisional Manger – Audit, Procurement and Operational Finance, which summarised the work completed by Internal Audit during 2022/23, which included an opinion on the effectiveness of the Council’s overall risk management, control and governance processes.</p> <p>The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) required the Head of Internal Audit to deliver an annual audit opinion and report that could be used to inform the Annual Governance Statement (the Internal Audit Annual Report 2022/23 was appended to the report).</p> <p>It was noted that it was the view of the Head of Internal Audit that sufficient audit work was completed during the year to be able to form an overall opinion. It was reported that the Council’s risk management, control and governance processes that were in place during 2022/23</p>	

were considered to be adequate and had operated effectively during the year.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) receives and notes the overall opinion on the Council's risk management control and governance processes that were in place during 2022/23;
- 2) notes the Internal Audit Charter which sets out the purpose, authority and responsibility of the Council's internal audit activity; and
- 3) notes and endorses the safeguards established to limit any impairment to the independence or objectivity of the internal audit function.

AGB3 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT - 2022/23

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director - Finance, which sought approval of the 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement (AGS). A copy of the draft Statement was appended to the report.

The AGS described how the Council continued to maintain a robust governance framework and continually reviewed and developed its arrangements to demonstrate good corporate governance.

Once approved the AGS would be signed by the Council Leader and Chief Executive and published on the Council's website.

A Member commented on the new governance arrangements ("Office for Local Government"), which were announced by Central Government on 4 July 2023. It was expected that Civil Servants would communicate to all local authorities further details on the proposed arrangements.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 be approved.

AGB4 EXTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director – Finance, which provided a copy of the Interim External Auditor's, Grant Thornton UK LLP, Annual Report 2021/22.

The External Auditor was required to consider

whether the Council had put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The Annual Report detailed overall arrangements, as well as providing key recommendations on any significant weaknesses in arrangements identified during the audit.

On behalf of Grant Thornton UK LLP, Michael Green presented details of the findings of the External Auditor to the Board.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the 2021/22 External Audit Annual Report be noted, including recommendations set out on pages 11, 15 and 22 of the report.

AGB5 EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN – 2022/23 YEAR-END

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director - Finance, which set out the 2022/23 year-end Audit Plan, presented by the External Auditor, Grant Thornton UK LLP.

The Board was advised that the External Audit Plan was attached to the report and set out details of risks identified, their approach to the value for money conclusion and audit fees.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the External Audit Plan for 2022/23 year-end be noted.

AGB6 SCHEDULE 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

The Board considered:

- 1) whether members of the press and public should be excluded from the meeting of the Board during consideration of the following items of business in accordance with Sub-Section 4 of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be considered, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972; and
- 2) whether the disclosure of information was in the public interest, whether any relevant exemptions were

applicable and whether, when applying the public interest test and exemptions, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information.

RESOLVED: That as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information, members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business, in accordance with Sub-Section 4 of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

AGB7 INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Board received a report from the Divisional Manager – Audit, Procurement and Operational Finance, updating them on the internal audit activity since the last progress report to the Board on 22 March 2023. It also highlighted any matters that were relevant to the Board's responsibilities as the Council's Audit Committee.

Members were referred to appendix one, which listed all the planned work for the year and the current status. It was noted that the schedule of audit would be updated for future meetings to reflect the progress made in completing audits and any reprioritisation of work or enforced changes.

It was noted that by the end of May 2023, 192 days of audit work had been completed which represented approximately 16% of the total planned days for the year. The team was currently fully staffed and was making good progress finalising work from 2022/23 and in progressing planned work for 2023/24.

Appended to the report were the executive summaries of the reports issued numbering 2 to 18, as listed in paragraph 4.2.

RESOLVED: That the Internal Audit Progress Report and comments made be noted.

Meeting ended at 7.30 p.m.