

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Audit and Governance Board held on Wednesday, 27 September 2023 at the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Polhill (Chair), Wall (Vice-Chair), Abbott, Begg, Bevan, McDermott and Wallace

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Dourley, Gilligan and N. Plumpton Walsh

Absence declared on Council business: None

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

Also in attendance: S. Nixon – Grant Thornton

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

		<i>Action</i>
AGB8	MINUTES	
	<p>The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2023, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.</p>	
AGB9	2022/23 EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE	
	<p>The Board received a progress update regarding the audit of the Council's 2022/23 year-end accounts from Grant Thornton UK LLP.</p> <p>It was reported that the audit was close to completion and the Auditor's findings would be reported to the Board in November 2022 alongside the 2022/23 Statement of Accounts prior to their publication by 30 November 2023.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the verbal progress update by the Council's external auditor Grant Thornton UK LLP be received.</p>	
AGB10	ANTI FRAUD & CORRUPTION UPDATE	
	<p>The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, which provided an annual update on developments in regard to the Council's anti-fraud and anti-</p>	

corruption activity.

It was reported that the Board was responsible for the monitoring and reviewing the adequacy of the Council's anti-fraud and anti-corruption arrangements, which was a key aspect of the Council's risk management, control and governance framework.

The Board considered information relating to the following activities:

- A commentary on the fraud risk landscape;
- A summary of the fraud investigations from 2022/23;
- HR related investigations from 2022/23;
- Whistleblowing complaints received and action taken;
- An update on the National Fraud Initiative;
- Details of fraud investigation related information reported under the Transparency Code;
- Details of ongoing and planned anti-fraud work; and
- Details of the Council's suite of anti-fraud and anti-corruption related policies.

The Board discussed compromise agreements and how they were defined within the Council. Members proposed that the Council should have a clearer definition of a compromise agreement which should include reference to neutral and financial agreements. It was agreed to that a report covering these matters would be submitted to the next meeting of the Board.

Information on the number of Non-Disclosure Agreements signed by the Council in the past year and details of how the figure relating to Housing Waiting List valuation (£184,169) was calculated, would be provided to the Board.

RESOLVED: That the annual update on anti-fraud and corruption related activity be noted and the Board supports the counter fraud working being undertaken.

Operational
Director - Finance

AGB11 INFORMING THE EXTERNAL AUDIT RISK ASSESSMENT

The Board considered a report by the Operational Director - Finance, which presented for information the draft response provided to the annual letter to the Board from Grant Thornton, the Council's external auditors, regarding their year-end audit of accounts work.

The Appendix to the report outlined the draft responses provided to a number of questions contained in a letter from Grant Thornton, which it was proposed to provide to them in order to assist with their year-end audit of accounts.

RESOLVED: That the draft responses shown in the Appendix be provided to the Council's external auditors.

AGB12 CORPORATE RISK REGISTER ANNUAL UPDATE 2023/24

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director – Chief Executive's Delivery Unit, on the annual update of the Corporate Risk Register for 2023/24.

The Board was advised that the Council recognised its responsibility to manage both internal and external risks as a key component of good corporate governance. At Directorate level, arrangements were in place for the high risk mitigation measures on the half year monitoring reports which were reviewed and updated at mid-year in line with Directorate Business Plans. Progress was then reported to Management Team and Policy and Performance Boards.

It was reported that the Risk Control Measures had been reviewed and updated in line with current changes within the Authority and as proposed by managers and stakeholders. The risks had been re-prioritised so that people, (the community and staff), took priority. These were set out in the report.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the progress of actions be noted; and
- 2) the robustness of the Corporate Risk Register and the adequacy of the associated risk management arrangements be noted.

AGB13 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.

AGB14 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 5 July 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 its current status. The schedule of audits had been updated to reflect the progress made in completing audits since the last update to the Board. By the end of August 2023, 500 days of audit work had been completed, which represented 41% of the total planned days for the year. It was noted that some audits had taken longer to complete than originally planned which was partly due to issues arising in the course of the audit work and the team having three new starters who were undergoing training. It was likely that this would impact on overall coverage and some work may have to be put back to 2024/25.

Appended to the report were the executive

summaries of the reports issued numbering 2 to 15, as listed in the report.

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

Meeting ended at 7.25 p.m.