

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Audit and Governance Board held on Wednesday, 4 June 2025 at the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Polhill (Chair), Connolly (Vice-Chair), Abbott, V. Hill, Ratcliffe, Thornton and Wallace

Apologies for Absence: None

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: E. Dawson, M. Murphy, S. Baker, G. Ferguson, S. Middlehurst and R. Rout

Also in attendance: L. Luddington and M. Derrick – Grant Thornton UK LLP

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

		<i>Action</i>
AGB1	MINUTES	
	The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2025, were taken as read and signed as a correct record. It was noted that Councillor Thornton would be appointed as a representative on the Transformation Board.	
AGB2	CORPORATE RISK REGISTER REVIEW - MAY 2025	
	The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director – Chief Executive's Delivery Unit, on the annual update of the Corporate Risk Register for 2025/26. 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. The Risk Control Measures had been reviewed and updated in line with current charges within the Authority and as proposed by managers and internal stakeholders. It was noted that a new Risk Management Policy was in development which would be accompanied by a new risk register design. This was being completed over the summer	

of 2025 and it was anticipated that it would be submitted to the Board in September 2025 for consideration and approval.

A Board Member raised an issue around vulnerable adults in social care and it was agreed that this would be reported back to the relevant department.

RESOLVED: That

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

AGB3 ANNUAL REPORT ON WAIVERS OF PROCUREMENT STANDING ORDERS

The Board considered a report of the Director of Finance, which set out the Council's arrangements for the waiver of Procurement Standing Orders and provided details of all the waivers approved in 2024/25.

The Board was advised that there were three procedures for the approval of requests to waive Procurement Standing Orders:

- Emergency Procedures;
- Non-Emergency Procedures (exceeding £100k)
- Non-Emergency Procedures (up to £100k)

The report detailed the advantages waivers can offer when used appropriately, the process for waiver requests including checks and confirmations and a summary of those waivers approved in 2024/25.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Board confirms its assurance in the appropriateness of the processes followed for the approval of waivers to Procurement Standing Orders; and
- 2) the waivers of Procurement Standing Orders approved in 2024/25 be noted.

AGB4 INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT AND OPINION – 2024/25

The Board considered a report of the Head of Audit, Procurement and Operational Finance, which summarised the work completed by Internal Audit during 2024/25, provided his annual opinion on the Council's risk management, control and governance processes and outlined how Internal Audit complied with the PSIAS throughout the year.

The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) required the Head of Internal Audit to produce an annual report that included an overall opinion to support the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

RESOLVED: That the Board receives and notes this report as a source of independent assurance on the effectiveness of the Council's risk management control and governance arrangements during 2024/25.

AGB5 EXTERNAL AUDITOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24 – ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Board considered a report of the Director of Finance, which provided an update on the actions being taken to address the recommendations arising from the External Auditor's 2023/24 Annual Report (AAR) which was presented to the Board at its meeting on 25 November 2024. The AAR included two statutory recommendations, which given their importance were required to be approved by Council on 5 December 2024. In addition, the External Auditor highlighted a number of recommendations made for the previous year which were still being addressed.

An action plan had been prepared to manage the work being undertaken in response to the External Auditor's recommendations. The Board noted that good progress had been made in addressing all of the recommendations and the Appendix presented details of progress in relation to the Action Plan.

RESOLVED: That the progress update regarding the 2023/24 AAR Action Plan as presented in the Appendix be noted.

AGB6 EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN – 2024/25 YEAR-END

The Board considered a report of the Director of Finance, which set out the 2024/25 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 2024/25 year-end be noted.

AGB7 INFORMING THE EXTERNAL AUDIT RISK ASSESSMENT

The Board considered a report by the Director of 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.

AGB8 DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2024/25

The Board considered a report of the Director of Finance, which sought approval of the draft 2024/25 Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The final version would be reported to the Board in September.

It was noted that the AGS, attached to the report at Appendix 1, provided an overview of the governance framework in place for 2024/25 and a Governance Review Action Plan Update. In addition, the AGS offered a transparent assessment of the Council's governance arrangements and the challenges it currently faced.

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

It was noted that there were eight areas previously identified for improvement last year and details of the actions taken were set out in the report, together with eight areas identified for the forthcoming year.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Governance Statement 2024/25 be approved.

AGB9 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.

AGB10 SIRO REPORT Q1

The Board considered a report of the Director of ICT and Support Services, that provided a quarter one update on the Council's overall Information Governance, Cyber Security and Data Protection risk. The report provided information on:

- Subject Access Requests
- Freedom of Information Requests
- Data Breaches
- Update on Cyber Security and the Cyber Assessment Framework

It was requested that a copy of the cyber assessment framework could be circulated to the Board for information.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and approved.

AGB11 INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Board considered a report of the Head of Audit and Operational Finance, which provided an update on internal audit activity since the last progress to the Board on 19 March 2025. 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 April 2025, 87 days of audit work had been completed, which represented just over 8.3% of the total planned days for the year.

Appended to the report were the executive summaries of the reports issued numbering 2 to 12, as listed in the report.

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

Meeting ended at 7.33 p.m.