

Cherwell District Council

Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee held at 39 Castle Quay, Banbury, OX16 5FD, on 24 September 2025 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Simon Lytton (Chair)
Councillor David Rogers (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Robert Parkinson
Councillor Dom Vaitkus
Sarah Thompson, Independent Person, no voting rights

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Besmira Brasha
Councillor Nicholas Mawer

Also Present:

Councillor Chris Brant, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services
Councillor Lesley McLean, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration

Also Present Virtually:

Mark Bartlett, External Audit, Bishop Fleming

Officers:

Joanne Kaye, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager
Patrick Davis, Democratic and Elections Officer

Officers Attending Virtually:

Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Ed Potter, Assistant Director Environmental Services
Claire Cox, Assistant Director Human Resources

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

33 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 July 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

34 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair advised the Committee that he had agreed to amend the order of the agenda. Item 10, Monitoring Officers' Annual Report 2024/25 – Complaints, Conduct & Ethics would be the first report.

35 **Requests to Address the Meeting**

There were no requests to address the meeting.

36 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

37 **Monitoring Officer's Annual Report 2024/25 - Complaints, Conduct & Ethics**

The Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer submitted an annual report on matters relating to the standards and conduct of Members within the Cherwell District at District and parish level and information in respect of complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman in the 2024/25 municipal year.

In introducing the report, the Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer explained that it was incumbent on the Monitoring Officer to report on the functions for which he was responsible, including Code of Conduct matters. The standards of ethical conduct of Members at both District and Town and Parish level remained good.

With regard to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report, the Committee was advised only one complaint had been upheld by the Ombudsman but overall, there were no serious concerns raised by the report.

Resolved

- (1) That the Monitoring Officer report including the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report be noted and it be noted it would be circulated to all Town and Parish Councils in the district for information.

38

External Audit Update 2024/25

Mark Bartlett, Director at Bishop Fleming, the Council's external auditors, reported that the External Audit 2024/25 was in its final stages and there were no issues to report to date. The value for money audit was progressing well and that there were no items of concern to raise at this stage.

Resolved

- (1) That the verbal update on the External Audit 2024/25 be noted.

39

Risk Monitoring Report - Quarter 1 2025-2026

The Assistant Director Customer Focus submitted a report to update the Committee on how well the Council was managing its strategic risks.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services explained the Council's overall risk profile remained stable and there were no changes to the residual risk score in the corporate risk register. The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services highlighted a change to the risk numbering of items between the current report and previous versions which meant that the risk scores would not be directly comparable.

In response to a Committee question asking for more details regarding risk L04 – Five year housing land supply and a query regarding why there had been no change to risk L10 – Cyber Security and what the council was doing to address potential cyber attacks, the Head of Finance undertook to liaise with the risk owners and provide a written response.

Resolved

- (1) That the Risk Monitoring Report for Quarter 1 2025 – 26 be noted.

40

Health and Safety Report Quarter 1 2025/2026

The Assistant Director Human Resources submitted a report that provided the Committee with the Council's Health and Safety performance for Quarter 1 of the 2025/26 financial year.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services explained that there had been no regulatory interventions or enforcement action taken against the council during this reporting period. The Health and Safety Supervisor was supporting Environmental Services teams to address actions that had arisen following the Internal Audit carried out by Veritau, the Council's Internal Auditors, in December 2024.

In response to a question regarding the impact of the introduction of kerbside glass collection on the health and safety of waste collection staff, the Assistant Director Environmental Services explained that due to the proposed

collection method, there would be a noise and weight impact for staff. Waste collection was an extremely dangerous industry. Health and safety was paramount to keep staff and the public safe. Training was extremely important with safety embedded in the workforce

In his capacity as Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor Middleton highlighted the importance of investing in the council's depots to maintain employee safety, future proof the service and provide services required by residents.

In considering the report, the Committee noted that the council had begun looking at properties in its portfolio to establish whether the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 (Martyn's Law) would have an impact on each property and requested that an update be included in a future report

Resolved

- (1) That the Health and Safety Report performance for Quarter 1 of the 2025/26 financial year be noted.

41

Environmental, Social and Governance considerations

The Assistant Director Finance (S151 Officer) submitted a report to update the Committee on the Council's position on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) considerations in relation to its investments and line with CIPFA recommendations.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration explained that whilst the Council looked to invest sustainably, security, liquidity and yield remained the primary investment considerations as required by the Treasury Management Code and there was no requirement currently to audit organisation's ESG.

In response to a question regarding the investments held by the council, the Head of Finance confirmed that the council only held funds in Article 8 (funds that promoted, among other characteristics, environmental or social characteristics, or a combination of those characteristics, provided that the companies in which the investments are made follow good governance practices) and Article 9 (funds that had sustainable investment as their objective) categories. There were no funds currently held in the Article 6 category (funds that do not integrate sustainability into the investment process).

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) considerations report be noted.

42 **Support to Subsidiaries**

The Assistant Director Finance (S151 Officer) submitted a report to inform the Committee of the overall level of support provided to the council's subsidiaries and how this was considered as part of the external audit.

43 **Exclusion of Press and Public**

Resolved

That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that, if the public and press were present, it would be likely that exempt information falling under the provisions of Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraph 3 would be disclosed to them, and that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

44 **Support to Subsidiaries - Exempt Appendix**

The Committee considered the exempt appendix to the report on Support to Subsidiaries which summarised the support the council had extended to its subsidiaries.

In introducing the exempt appendix, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration advised that it was important for the Committee to be aware of the level of support extended in order to ensure good governance, manage risk and to inform decision making.

45 **Readmittance of the Press and Public**

Resolved

That the press and public be readmitted to the meeting.

46 **Support to Subsidiaries**

Having considered the exempt appendix, the Committee considered the public report.

Resolved

- (1) That the report and exempt appendix be noted.

Review of Committee Work Programme

The Committee considered its work plan and had no queries or additional items for the Committee Work Plan.

Resolved

- (1) That the work programme update be noted.

The meeting ended at 7.50 pm

Chair:

Date: