

Cherwell District Council

Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 15 November 2023 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Lynn Pratt (Chairman)
Councillor Besmira Brasha
Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Donna Ford
Councillor Simon Lytton
Councillor Ian Middleton
Harry Lawson, Independent Person (no voting rights)
Sarah Thompson, Independent Person (no voting rights)

Substitute Members:

Councillor Barry Wood (In place of Councillor Simon Holland)

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Simon Holland
Councillor Harry Knight

Also Present:

Councillor Adam Nell, Portfolio Holder for Finance

Also Present Virtually:

Alison Kennett, External Audit
Maria Grindley, External Audit

Officers:

Joanne Kaye, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer
Sarah Cox, Chief Internal Auditor
Declan Brolly, Corporate Fraud Officer
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager
David Rogers, Democratic and Elections Officer

Officers Attending Virtually:

Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer
Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance & Insight Team Leader

34 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

35 **Petitions and Requests to Address the Meeting**

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

36 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 27 September 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

37 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman had two announcements:

1.) Two private sessions would take place for Committee members after the meeting, the first with the Internal Audit Team and the second with the External Auditors.

2.) The Council's Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Service was currently provided by Oxfordshire County Council. Oxfordshire County Council had chosen to end the arrangement and submitted 6 months written notice of termination of the agreement with arrangements for Internal Audit and Counter Fraud provided by the County Council coming to an end on 30 April 2024. The Chief Internal Auditor would still attend the May AARC meeting to present the Chief Internal Auditor's annual report and opinion for 2023/24.

Officers would be considering the best option for provision of the Internal Audit and Counter Fraud functions at Cherwell District Council in the future. The Committee would be further updated in due course.

38 **Performance, Finance and Risk Monitoring Report**

The Assistant Director of Customer Focus submitted a report that updated the Committee on how well the council was managing its Strategic Risks.

In introducing the report, the Performance and Insight Team Leader advised the Committee that there were no substantial changes.

Resolved

(1) That the Risk Monitoring Report for September 2023 be noted.

39 **Update on Counter Fraud Annual Plan 2023/24**

The Assistant Director of Finance and S151 Officer submitted a report that presented a summary of activity against the Annual Plan for the Counter-Fraud service at CDC for 2023/24, which had previously been presented to the July 2023 meeting of the Committee. The Plan supported the Council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy by ensuring that the Council had proportionate and effective resources and controls in place to prevent and detect fraud as well as investigate those matters that did arise.

Resolved

- (1) That the summary of activity against the Annual Counter Fraud Plan for 2023/24 be noted.

40 **External Audit Progress 2021/22**

The External Auditor gave a verbal update and advised the Committee that most fieldwork was complete. Some follow up work was being undertaken including some queries to the technical team which, once resolved, should allow the conclusion of audit.

Resolved

- (1) That the verbal update be noted.

41 **Treasury Management Mid Year Review**

The Assistant Director of Finance submitted a report that updated the Committee on treasury management performance and compliance with treasury management policy for 2023-24 as required by the Treasury Management Code of Practice.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance advised that all treasury management activities undertaken to date during the financial year 2023-24 complied with the CIPFA Code of Practice and the Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy, and all Prudential Indicators were met during the reporting period. Over the course of the year, there was an overall Treasury Management forecast underspend of £1.214m compared to the approved budget.

In response to Committee questions in relation to subsidiary companies, the Portfolio Holder for Finance explained that Graven Hill was a commercial business and published its accounts accordingly. The Shareholder Committee was responsible for monitoring the performance of Graven Hill.

In response to Members' questions relating to internal and external borrowing, the Head of Finance explained that internal borrowing was when existing funds to finance the cash flow of the council's capital expenditure rather than

borrowing externally immediately for the programme which saved the council on interest charges.

The Head of Finance undertook to provide a written response on questions regarding the monitoring and dividends of shares invested in non-treasury funds, maturity structure of borrowing and capital expenditure grants.

Resolved

- (1) That the Treasury Management Mid-Year Review Report be noted.

42 **Local Code of Corporate Governance**

The Assistant Director of Law and Governance submitted a report to review of the Local Code of Corporate Governance. The Code was part of the overall system of internal control at the Council and supported the provision of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) which was approved annually by the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee.

Resolved

- (1) That the Local Code of Corporate Governance be agreed.

43 **Financial Management Code - Forecast Self-Assessment Update**

The Assistant Director of Finance submitted a report which updated the Committee on the results of the Council's forecast self-assessment position at February 2024 against the requirements of CIPFA's Financial Management Code. There was continued strong compliance, demonstrating a resilient and sustainable approach to managing the Council's funds.

Resolved

- (1) That the Council's forecast self-assessment position at February 2024 against the requirements of CIPFA's Financial Management Code be noted.

44 **Work Programme**

The Head of Finance updated the committee on the work programme.

Resolved

- (1) That the Work Programme be noted.

45 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting ended at 7.27 pm

Chairman:

Date: