

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 19 November 2025 at 6.30 pm

Present:

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

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Nicholas Mawer
Councillor Ian Middleton

Also Present:

Councillor Lesley McLean, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property & Regeneration

Also Present Virtually:

Ed Lambert-Martin, Internal Audit - Veritau
Sarah Butler, Internal Audit, Veritau
Craig Sullivan, External Audit, Bishop Fleming
Mark Bartlett, External Audit, Bishop Fleming

Officers:

Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer
Joanne Kaye, Head of Finance and Deputy S151 Officer
Patrick Davis, Democratic and Elections Officer

Officers Attending Virtually:

Ed Potter, Assistant Director Environmental Services
Ruth Wooldridge, Health and Safety Manager

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

49 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24 September 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

50 **Chair's Announcements**

There were no Chair's announcements.

51 **Requests to Address the Meeting**

There were no requests to address the meeting.

52 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

53 **Internal Audit Progress Report 2025/26**

The Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report that provided the Committee with an update on the delivery of the internal audit work programme for 2025/26.

In introducing the report, Ed Lambert-Martin, Internal Audit Manager at Veritau reported that four internal audits had been completed since the last report was submitted to the Committee. Two had been rated as substantial assurance; Governance and decision making, and Treasury management, and two at reasonable assurance; Risk Management, and Performance Management Framework.

The Committee was assured that although there were fourteen overdue actions, these were largely due to the timings of the follow up work following the change in internal auditors last year and these were being addressed by the relevant officers in liaison with Veritau.

Resolved

- (1) That the progress made in delivering the 2025/26 internal audit work programme be noted.

54 **Counter Fraud Progress Report**

The Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report which presented an update on counter fraud work undertaken so far in 2025/26.

In response to a question regarding the remedies sought from claimants who had made fraudulent or erroneous claims, it was confirmed that the values involved related to the repayments of the over provision rather than through legal action undertaken by the Council.

Resolved

- (1) That the counter fraud progress report be noted.

55

External Audit Reports 2024/25

The Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151 officer) submitted a report on the External Audit 2024/25 for the Committee to receive the auditors' Audit Completion Report for 2024/25, the draft Annual Auditor's Report and draft Letter of Representation.

In introducing the report, Craig Sullivan Partner at Bishop Fleming and Mark Bartlett Director at Bishop Fleming, updated the Committee on the progress of the Audit Completion Report and the Auditors Annual Report. Both reports were still in draft format but no significant issues had been identified to date. It was anticipated that final versions would be issued in December.

Members were also provided with an update on the timetable and mechanisms for building back assurance in the financial statements following the disclaimed opinion provided by the previous external auditor due to it not undertaking the 2022/23 external audit as a consequence of resourcing constraints.

In response to a query regarding one of the unadjusted items in the Auditors Annual Report, the Director at Bishop Fleming confirmed that the figure of £687,000 was an extrapolated estimate based on the potential impact of the error across the full population rather than an actual value.

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the Audit Completion Report for 2024/25 from the council's external auditors, Bishop Fleming be noted.
- (2) That the contents of the draft Auditor's Annual Report for 2024/25 be noted.
- (3) That the draft Letter of Representation for 2024/25 be noted.
- (4) That once the final audit opinion for 2024/25 was received, the Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer), in consultation with the Chair of the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee (or Vice Chair in their absence), be authorised to make any further changes to the accounts agreed with the auditors and sign the accounts and it be noted any further changes would be brought to the Committee's attention at its next meeting following the signing.

- (5) That the Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer), in consultation with the Chair of the Committee (or Vice Chair in their absence), be authorised to make any further changes to the Letter of Representation agreed with the auditors that may arise during completion of the audit and it be noted that any further changes will be brought to the Committee's attention at its next meeting following the signing.

56 **Risk Monitoring Report Quarter 2 2025-26**

The Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer) submitted a report to update the Committee on how well the Council was managing its strategic risks.

In introducing the report, the Performance Team Leader confirmed that the Leadership Risk Register remained stable. The only change was the decrease in the score for risk L05 – Planning Applications for Major Developments, from 16 (High) to 12 (Medium) due to the service implementing an action plan following receipt of the Planning Advisory Service report earlier in the year.

In response to a question regarding risk L01 – Financial Resilience and whether any work was underway to affect a change on the rating score for this, the Committee was advised that this risk derived from the proposed changes in the way funding was allocated to councils by Central Government and as such was outside of the council's control. The Assistant Director of Finance assured the Committee that appropriate mitigations had been implemented where possible but as details of the new funding model were unknown there was a limit as to what the council was able to do at this stage. It was anticipated that more information would be made available to the council towards the end of the year.

Resolved

- (1) That the Risk Monitoring Report for Quarter 2 2025 – 26 be noted.

57 **Risk Management Strategy and Guidance**

The Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer) submitted a report that proposed a new Risk Management Strategy and Guidance, that aimed to ensure the council's effective and compliant risk management.

In introducing the report, the Performance Team Leader explained that the updated guidance had been developed following an internal audit and ensured that the council incorporated best practice from within the local government organisation sector in its Risk Management Strategy.

In response to Committee comments the Performance Team Leader clarified the mechanisms for identifying new risks and agreed to update the Guidance to ensure these were clearly set out.

Resolved

- (1) That the proposed Risk Management Strategy and Guidance be endorsed.

58

Health and Safety Report Quarter 2 Report

The Assistant Director Human Resources submitted a report that provided the Committee with the Council's Health and Safety performance for Quarter 2 of the 2025/26 financial year.

In introducing the report, the Health and Safety Manager explained that the majority of accidents and incidents recorded, involved Environmental Services as this was the highest risk service area for the Council as it operated in locations where there was not complete control over the working environment.

The Assistant Director, Environmental Services outlined the measures taken to reduce the number of incidents including the use of four-way cameras on all vehicles to assist in reversing manoeuvres. The Committee was advised that there was a correlation between the number of accidents and the experience of drivers. Over 50% of accidents involved drivers who had worked for the council for less than two years. To mitigate the high level of incidents, various measures had been implemented including an increase in the number of inspections alongside more regular team briefings. The Committee requested that year-on-year comparative data be included in future reports.

In response to a request for an update on the outstanding actions from the Veritau audit of Environmental Services, the Assistant Director, Environmental Services confirmed that the main outstanding items related to how the online iHasco training staff were required to complete, could be adapted to meet the requirements of Environmental Services and a solution to enable staff to access training material electronically. It was anticipated that both issues would be resolved imminently.

Resolved

- (1) That the Health and Safety Report performance for Quarter 2 of the 2025/26 financial year be noted.

59

Treasury Management Report - Mid-year review 2025/26 (September 2025)

The Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer) submitted a report that updated the Committee on treasury management performance and compliance with treasury management policy for 2025-26 as required by the Treasury Management Code of Practice.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration advised that as at the end of Quarter 2 2025-26, the Council had borrowing of £171M and investments of £41M, which resulted in a net borrowing position of £130M.

Resolved

- (1) That the Treasury Management mid-year review 2025-26 be noted and Council be recommended to receive the report.

60 **Financial Management Code - Forecast Self-Assessment Update 2025/26**

The Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer) submitted a report which updated the Committee on the results of the Council's forecast self-assessment position as at February 2026 against the requirements of CIPFA's Financial Management Code.

In introducing the report, the Head of Finance advised the Committee that the Financial Management Code was the minimum that Local Authorities had to do to comply with Section 151 of the Local Government Act to meet its financial responsibilities and that this was the responsibility of the Section 151 officer, Corporate Leadership team and the Executive.

The Committee was advised that the self-assessment showed continued strong compliance. It was green in all areas of the Financial Management Code which demonstrated a resilient and sustainable approach to managing the Council's finances.

Resolved

- (1) That the Council's forecast self-assessment position of strong compliance at February 2026 against the requirements of CIPFA's Financial Management Code be noted.

61 **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 7.48 pm

Chair:

Date: