

Cherwell District Council

Audit and Governance Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee held at 39 Castle Quay, Banbury, OX16 5FD, on 17 June 2026 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Simon Lytton (Chair)
Councillor David Rogers (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Besmira Brasha
Councillor Mark Gorman
Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Julian Nedelcu
Councillor Robert Parkinson
Nelly Lukwo, Independent Person, no voting rights
Sarah Thompson, Independent Person, no voting rights

Substitute Members:

Councillor Lesley McLean (In place of Councillor Alisa Russell)

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Alisa Russell

Also Present:

Councillor David Hingley, Portfolio Holder for Finance
Councillor Frank Ideh, Portfolio Holder for Law and Governance
Ed Lambert-Martin, Internal Audit - Veritau
Stuart Limb, Internal Audit - Veritau

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:

Kaimi Ithia, Head of Chief Executive's Office
Claire Cox, Assistant Director Human Resources
Ed Potter, Assistant Director Environmental Services
Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader
Ruth Wooldridge, Health and Safety Manager

3 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

4 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 18 March 2026 and 20 May 2026 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5 **Chair's Announcements**

There were no Chair's announcements.

6 **Requests to Address the Meeting**

There were no requests to address the meeting.

7 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

8 **Health & Safety Quarter 4 2025-26**

The Assistant Director Human Resources submitted a report to provide the Committee with an update on the Council's Health and Safety performance for Quarter 4 of the 2025/26 financial year.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Law and Governance explained that as in previous reporting periods, the majority of incidents involved Environmental Services as this was the highest risk area for the Council. Each incident was investigated and corrective action taken where necessary including training, supervision and monitoring.

In response to a question regarding Graph 1, that showed the percentage of time lost due to sickness, the Assistant Director Human Resources confirmed that this was the percentage for each service and was not based on the actual numbers of staff in each department. The higher percentage for Environmental Services was largely due to there being a higher number of manual staff, who were unable to work from home, unlike office based staff, for illnesses that did not require workers to be absent under agile working principles.

In response to a question regarding the audit of community centres and if there was a potential risk arising from the change in status of the relationship between the council and the community centres, the Assistant Director

Human Resources and Healthy and Safety Manager undertook to provide details to Committee members after the meeting.

In response to a question regarding the resource level to manage health and safety issues within the Environment Services department, the Assistant Director Environmental Services explained that the significant level of risk associated with the activities undertaken within the service required additional support and expertise to ensure the risks were mitigated as much as possible. The Assistant Director Environment Services outlined the processes in place for new starter induction of new employees and ongoing training for existing employees, which took place on a regular basis and following any accidents. It was reiterated that line management for health and safety rested with supervisors and that the Health and Safety team visited the depots regularly to provide support to the arrangements in place.

Resolved

- (1) That the Health and Safety Report Quarter 4 2025/26 be noted.

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Risk Monitoring Report Quarter 4 2025-26

The Head of Chief Executive's Office submitted a report to update the Committee on how well the Council was managing its strategic risks.

In introducing the report, the Leader (of the Council) – Strategic Partnerships and Regeneration (Councillor McLean) confirmed that there were no score changes in the Leadership Risk Register during the last quarter of the 2025-26 financial year. High and medium risks remained under close review with mitigating actions in place.

The Committee was advised that as the risk register reflected the final quarter of the 2025-26 financial year, it did not include any changes in light of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) recently placing the council under government designation for major developments. The Leader – Strategic Partnerships and Regeneration explained that once further review of the impact had concluded, the risk register would be updated accordingly.

Resolved

- (1) That the Risk Monitoring Report for Quarter 4 2025-26 be noted

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Head of Internal Audit Annual Report 2025-26

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report which presented the Head of Internal Audit's Annual Report for 2025/26 which summarised internal audit work undertaken in 2025/26 and provided an opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the council's framework of governance, risk management and control.

In introducing the report, Ed Lambert-Martin, Internal Audit Manager at Veritau advised the Committee that for the 2025-26 financial year the Head of Internal Audit's opinion was that "Reasonable Assurance" could be provided on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the council's framework of governance, risk management and control. One significant control weakness had been identified which was considered relevant to the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement, the council's utilities management arrangements.

In response to a question regarding the significant control weakness, the Internal Audit Manager explained that progress had been made to address issues identified in the utilities management audit issued in January 2024, however weaknesses remained relating to the fragmented responsibilities, limited oversight and financial risk exposure. Actions to address these had been identified and included the appointment of a specialist external company. Veritau would conduct further work to confirm the action had been completed and weaknesses addressed.

In response to a request for an update on the internal audits that were currently in progress, the Internal Audit Manager advised that the audit work on Section 106 agreements was currently being reviewed, the Crown House and Graven Hill audit was scheduled for submission to the September Committee meeting. Work had only just commenced on the Project management relating to the Bicester Market Square audit.

Resolved

- (1) That the results of internal audit work undertaken, and the opinion of the Head of Internal Audit that Reasonable Assurance can be provided on the adequacy and effectiveness of the council's framework of governance, risk management and internal control be noted.
- (2) That the update on Veritau's quality assurance and development arrangements, including the confirmation that the internal audit service conforms to public sector internal auditing standards be noted.
- (3) That it be noted that one significant control weakness had been identified by internal audit during the year which was considered relevant to the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement, this being: the council's utilities management arrangements.

Counter Fraud Annual Report 2025-26

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report which presented the Counter Fraud Annual Report for 2025/26.

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) explained that the council's counter fraud service was delivered by Veritau. The savings realised from work undertaken were approximately the same as its costs.

In response to a question regarding the significant increase in the number of referrals made to the Counter Fraud Team, the Corporate Investigations Manager explained that this did not necessarily represent an increase in the level of fraud and was likely due to a heightened awareness among staff of the risk of fraud. The Corporate Fraud Manager undertook to provide comparative data in future reports to assist the Committee to understand trends.

In response to a query regarding the outcomes of fraud investigations, the Corporate Investigations Manager advised that if significant issues were identified in a particular area, the Internal Audit team (Veritau) would be notified to determine whether a full investigation should be undertaken.

Resolved

- (1) That the Counter Fraud Annual Report 2025-26 be noted.

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Treasury Management Report - Outturn 2025/26

The Assistant Director Finance (S151 Officer) submitted a report which provided information on treasury management performance and compliance with the Treasury Management Policy for 2025-26 as required by the Treasury Management Code of Practice. The report also demonstrated that all treasury management activities undertaken during the reporting period complied with the CIPFA Code of Practice and the council's approved Treasury Management Strategy.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance advised that as at 31 March 2026 the Council had borrowings of £144M, with investments of £16M, which resulted in a net borrowing of £128M. This reflected a £16M decrease on the net borrowing position as at the end of March 2025 and was largely due to a £14.6M discount received from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLb) following the early repayment of a 50 year loan.

In response to a question relating to the rationale of borrowing from other Councils rather than using the PWLB whose rates seemed lower, the Head of Finance explained that the PWLB rates were no longer available and that other council lending rates were now better than the PWLB ones.

Resolved

- (1) That the Treasury Management Performance Report – Outturn 2025/26 be noted and that Council be recommended to receive the report.

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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 8.20 pm

Chair:

Date: