

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING Monday, 27 September 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Zaheer (Chair); Councillors Ahmed, Sultan, Brett, James Gartside, Hussain, Martin, Massey and Williams

OFFICERS: A. Ibrahim (Monitoring Officer), J. Murphy (Chief Finance Officer), S. Knowles (Head of Internal Audit), M. Nixon (Head of Risk and Insurance), L. Steel (Counter Fraud Team), M. Garraway (Committees and Constitutional Services Manager)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: C. Ainsworth (Independent Person) and J. Sanderson (Independent Member)

APOLOGIES: M. Carruthers-Watt (Independent Person)

52 MINUTES RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee held on 9 August 2021 be approved as a correct record.

53 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

54 EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE

The Committee received a verbal update from the External Auditor in relation to work undertaken since the previous meeting of the Committee.

It was stated that the Council's accounts were expected to be signed off by the end of September 2021, with all work completed barring review and signing by the Council.

RESOLVED

That the update be noted.

55 INTERNAL AUDIT QUARTER ONE REPORT 2021/22

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Internal Audit which detailed work undertaken by the Internal Audit team during the first quarter of financial year 2021/22.

It was reported that a substantial or adequate assurance opinion was given for all audits completed during the period, with the exception of one audit, Corporate Electronic Records Management, which was assigned a limited assurance opinion. This included arrangements for the keeping, management and destruction of electronic records in folders on the IT network. Although some pockets of good practice were in place regarding the management of electronic records, 4 high and 6 medium recommendations were made

highlighting opportunities to improve. The high rated recommendations relate to:

- The Records Management Policy be reviewed and update
- A consistent corporate approach;
- A review / controlled purge of network folders; and
- The Corporate Retention Schedule be reviewed and updated

A working group has been established to drive the review of records management forward and Internal Audit were actively involved ensuring that progress is made.

Members sought clarification in relation to the missing Aldi vouchers which had been purchased under the Hardship Fund for distribution during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Head of Internal Audit gave assurance as to the measures taken to identify the issue and solutions to ensure that practices were improved for similar schemes.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

56 COUNTER FRAUD TEAM QUARTER ONE REPORT 2020/21

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Internal Audit summarising the work of the Counter Fraud Team during the first quarter of 2021/22.

It was reported that the Counter Fraud Team have received 170 referrals during the period and achieved £87,161 in overpayments and savings; 90 allegations of COVID-19 business grant fraud were under investigation; 60 allegations relating to Test & Trace were also investigated; in addition to this, the Counter Fraud Team had carried out reviews relating to the 2018/19 NFI Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support finding £20,000 in overpayments, with two remaining as outstanding.

Members sought clarification as to the amount of Council resources being used to support the National fraud initiative. The Counter Fraud Team was one of several teams within the Council checking data matches that are received from central government. The Team had received the 2020 NFI Single Person Discount, Council Tax matches and were waiting for a further data match to take place.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the amount of resource committed by the Council to supporting the National fraud initiative be communicated to Members of the Committee.

57 RISK MANAGEMENT PROGRESS REPORT - Q1 2021/22

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Risk and Insurance summarising the work undertaken during Quarter 1 of the 2021/22 year.

It was reported that reviews of the Corporate risk registers managed by both the Council and the Heywood Middleton and Rochdale Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) have been completed. There are no Red risks to report within either the Council's corporate risk register or the risk registers of individual Council's Services.

The Insurance team had achieved a claims cost mitigation result of £352,959.78 for the claims closed in the quarter. Renewals of Rochdale Council's programme of insurance policies were agreed effective from 1 June 2021.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

58 AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Resources updating Members on the work programme for the Committee within the municipal year.

It was reported that the Democratic Structures and Constitution Working Party had agreed to undertake a thorough review of the Councils constitution and anticipated to report to the meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee in March 2022.

RESOLVED

That the Democratic Structures and Constitution Working Party be requested to co-opt the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee; the two Independent Persons and the Independent Member of the Audit and Governance Committee, to assist with the review of the Council's constitution.

59 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

That the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following five items of business, in accordance with the provisions of Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

Reason for the resolution

Should the press and public remain during debate on these three items there may be a disclosure of information that is deemed to be exempt under Part 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

60 RISK MANAGEMENT PROGRESS REPORT - Q1 2021/22

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Risk and Insurance detailing required prevention and detection mechanisms within the Council's ICT infrastructure.

It was reported that the Council's Acceptable Use of ICT Policy had been rewritten and adopted by senior leadership following formal consultation with unions. Training was being rolled out for all Officers.

Members sought clarification on the provision of ICT equipment to assist them in their roles, noting the differing needs as compared to Officers. The ICT Service Delivery and Assurance Manager acknowledged the need to assess the offer for Councillors to support them in their role.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.
2. That a Study Group be established to review Members ICT provisions with Membership to be determined following consultation with Members.