

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

HELD: Wednesday, 29 May 2024

Start: 7.00 pm

Finish: 8.11 pm

PRESENT:

Councillors: R Molloy (Vice Chair in the Chair) C Coughlan
A Fennell P Hogan
J Mee A Owens
S Patel E Pope

Officers: James Pierce, Director of Finance and Corporate Resources,
Section 151 Officer
Alison Wood, Interim Corporate Finance Manager
Catherine Kirwan, Procurement Manager
Jennifer Lunn, Senior Legal Executive / Assistant Solicitor
Duncan Jowitt, Democratic Services Officer

1 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies received.

2 MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4, the Committee noted the termination of Councillor N Hennessy, and the appointment of Councillor Fennell for this meeting only, thereby giving effect to the wishes of the Political Groups.

3 URGENT BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2024 be received as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6 PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no items under this heading.

7 INTERNAL AUDIT STRATEGY AND ANNUAL PLAN 2024/25

The Director of Finance and Corporate Resources submitted a report to provide Members with the background to the preparation of the 2024/25 Internal Audit Plan and present it for approval.

The Chairman invited the Procurement Manager to present the report.

Members asked about how the number of days allocated compared to previous years and the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources confirmed that it was not significantly different.

The Committee considered the report as contained on pages 21-28 of the Book of Reports, which had been presented to Members for approval.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and approved.

8 INTERNAL AUDIT CHARTER 2024/25

The Corporate Director of Finance and Corporate Resources submitted a report to present the Internal Audit Charter 2024/25 to Members for approval.

The Chairman invited the Procurement Manager to present the report.

Members asked about the decision taken to have no involvement in any review of procurement for a period of 18 months.

The Committee considered the report as contained on pages 29-50 of the Book of Reports, which had been presented to Members for approval.

RESOLVED: That the progress report be noted and approved and that a more detailed report into the outstanding recommendations be taken to the next meeting.

9 INTERNAL AUDIT ACTIVITIES - PROGRESS REPORT

The Corporate Director of Finance and Corporate Resources submitted a report advising of progress against the 2023/24 Internal Audit Plan.

The Chairman invited the Procurement Manager to present the report to present the report.

Members asked about:

- the reasons for the slippages,
- progress in respect of cyber security due to difficulty in recruitment and increased capacity to fill those gaps.
- the number of outstanding recommendations – a more detailed report was requested.

The Committee considered the Progress Report as contained on pages 51-62 of the Book of Reports, which had been presented to Members for approval.

RESOLVED: That the progress report be noted and approved and that a more detailed report into the outstanding recommendations be taken to the next meeting.

10 GRANT THORNTON - AUDIT PLAN 2023-24

Consideration was given to the 2023-24 Audit Plan from our External Auditors Grant Thornton.

The Chairman welcomed and invited Ying Li Director, Grant Thornton, to present the report to the Committee.

Councillors raised questions about value for money arrangements and other councils' use of external/independent members of the committee

The Committee considered the Audit Plan 2023-24 as contained on pages 155 - 194 of the Book of Reports, which had been presented to Members for approval.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and approved.

11 GRANT THORNTON – ANNUAL AUDITOR'S REPORT FOR 2021-22 AND 2022-23

Consideration was given to the Auditor's Annual Report from our External Auditors Grant Thornton, which provided the combined Annual Report 2021-22 and 2022-23. The Chairman welcomed and invited Georgia Jones, Director, Grant Thornton, to present the report to the Committee.

Georgia Jones confirmed that the paper was essentially management's responses and the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources confirmed that it had been reviewed methodically.

The Committee considered the Auditor's Annual Report 2021-22 and 2022-23 as contained on pages 229-284 of the Book of Reports, which had been presented to Members for approval.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

12 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2023/24

Consideration was given to the Annual Governance Statement 2023/24, which provided an overview of how West Lancashire Borough Council's governance arrangements operate.

Councillors raised questions about service delivery and the continuance of Tawd Valley Development Shareholders Committee. The Corporate Director of Finance and Corporate Resources responded that it was still running.

The Committee considered the Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 as contained on pages 63-80 of the Book of Reports, which had been presented to Members for approval.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and approved.

13 INFORMING THE AUDIT RISK ASSESSMENT

The Committee considered the document - Informing the audit risk assessment - as contained on pages 81-110 of the Book of Reports, which had been presented to Members for approval.

RESOLVED: That the document be noted.

14 PROCUREMENT STRATEGY

The Director of Finance and Corporate Resources submitted a report setting out the details of the Procurement Strategy 2024- 2029.

The Chairman invited the Procurement Manager to present the report.

Members asked about the obsolete practice of opening paper tenders. The Procurement Manager explained that there was now a centralised procurement team and that there would be a briefing to update Members on the Procurement Act 2023.

The Committee considered the Procurement Policy as contained on pages 111-152 of the Book of Reports, which had been presented to Members.

RESOLVED: That the Committee recommend the Procurement Strategy 2024- 2029 to Council to be noted and approved.

15 REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT - USE OF POWERS

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager submitted a report on the Council's use of its powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Power's Act (RIPA).

The Committee considered the RIPA Activity as contained on pages 153-154 of the Book of Reports, which had been presented to Members.

RESOLVED: Members noted that the Council has not had cause to use its powers under RIPA during the last 12 months.

16 QUARTERLY EXEMPTION REPORT

The Director of Finance and Corporate Services submitted a report on the Council's grants of exemptions from Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and/ or the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

The Chairman invited the Procurement Manager to present the report.

The Committee considered the Quarterly Report on Procurement Exemptions as contained on pages 195-228 of the Book of Reports, which had been presented to Members.

RESOLVED: that the Council's exemption activity be noted.

17 **WORK PROGRAMME**

Consideration was given to the Committee's 2024/25 Work Programme as set out on page 285 of the Book of Reports.

Members asked that the more detailed report requested under item 9 (Internal Audit Activities) be added to the Work Programme for July and the Democratic Services Officer confirmed that it would be included. It was also suggested that the training column be removed from the Work Programme as it was seldom used and it was felt furthermore that the pre-meeting session was too short and future relevant training should be offered to full Council.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted and amended as suggested.

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Chairman