

Minutes of the Audit Committee

24 January 2024

-: Present :-

Councillor Penny (Chairman)

Councillors Fellows, Hutchings, Long, Maddison, Harvey and Strang

17. Apologies

It was reported that, in accordance with the wishes of the Liberal Democrat and Conservative Groups, the membership of the Committee had been amended for this meeting by including Councillors Harvey and Strang instead of Councillors Steve Darling and Brook.

18. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 13 December 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Director of Finance updated Members on discussions with the Council's external auditors, Grant Thornton, regarding the outstanding audits for 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 and confirmed with them that the audits for 2021/2022 will be completed and presented to Audit Committee with the Government backstop being utilised for the 2022/2023 accounts.

The Chairman informed Members that at the Audit Committee in December an update on the collection of Council Tax and NNDR was requested for the next meeting, given that there was only six weeks between the meetings of the Audit Committee the update had been deferred until the Committee meets on 27 March 2024.

19. Internal Audit - Half Year Report including the outcomes of the Follow Up on Areas Requiring Improvement

Members considered and noted the Internal Audit – Half Year Report including the outcomes of the follow up areas requiring improvement. The Head of the Devon Audit Partnership informed Members that the Internal Audit plan for 2023/24 was presented and approved in March 2023.

Members were advised that overall, and based on work performed to date during 2022/23, and Internal Audits experience from previous years, and the outcome of the Annual Follow Up exercise, the Head of Internal Audit's Opinion was one of 'Reasonable Assurance' on the adequacy and effectiveness of much of the Authority's internal control framework.

Members asked questions and received responses on the following areas:

- The appropriate time to audit the Coroners Service following the introduction of the new arrangements with Devon County Council;
- When was the management response to the audit report on Housing Options was expected;
- How did Internal Audit judge the appropriate pace for improvements and what action could they take to increase the pace of requested improvements; and
- Whether Internal Audit were on track to complete the Internal Audit Plan for 2023/2024.

20. Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25

The Audit Committee consider a report that set out the Treasury Management Strategy. Members were informed that the strategy aims to support the provision of all Council services by the management of the Council's cash flow, debt and investment operations in 2024/25 and effectively control the associated risks and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks.

Members raised questions and received responses in respect of:

- Interest rate sensitivity;
- Environmentally and socially responsible investments;
- How the Council decides whether to use internal funds or external borrowing;
- the collective balance of debt held by the Council; the Director Finance agreed to circulate further information.

Resolved:

The Audit Committee recommends to Council:

That:

- the Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25;
- the Prudential Indicators 2024/25; and
- the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement for 2024/25

be approved.

21. Counter Fraud and Error Update

Members noted a report that provided an update on counter fraud activity undertaken for the period of 1 April 2023 to 30 November 2023, including reported fraud and irregularities.

22. Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) Update

Members noted an update on the Council's use of its powers in respect of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA). Members were informed that although

Torbay Council had not undertaken any main RIPA authorisation since 2008 and had not authorised any requests for communications data since the Trading Standards service transferred to Devon County Council, the Council was still required to ensure that its policies, guidance and staff training was up to date.

Chairman/woman
