

No.

## GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2023.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The recording of the meeting is available [here](#).

Present: G. Chapman (Chair and Lay Member); N. Ireland (Vice-Chair and Lay Member); M. Evans (Lay Member); Councillors P. Drake, E. Goodjohn, M.J. Hooper, J.M. Norman, J. Protheroe and N.J. Wood.

Also present: Councillors H.C. Hamilton, W.A. Hennessy, G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing) and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health).

### 470 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing.”

### 471 MINUTES –

RESOLVED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2023 be approved as a correct record.

### 472 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

### 473 ANNUAL SAFEGUARDING UPDATE (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet on 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2023 was presented by the Director of Social Services.

Following the officer’s presentation, N. Ireland highlighted that it had been noted that there was an element of increased participation from parents, who had not previously engaged by holding of remote meetings through the pandemic. It was now determined that meetings would be held entirely in person, and Mr. Ireland queried the rationale behind that. The Director stated that there was a benefit in reading body language and non-verbal communication.

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N. Ireland referred to the 823 Safeguarding reports received during 2022/23, of which, 302 proceeded to enquiry and of those 70% were completed within the seven-working day time scale. N. Ireland queried whether there were any that were significantly outside of the seven-working day time scale and was there any learning to ensure that the time scale was met. In reply, the Director stated that he would check the information and report back via email.

The Chair referred to the 55 initial Child Protection Conferences which resulted in 151 children becoming subject to Child Protection Registration and risk planning, and he asked whether that included Children Looked After. The Chair highlighted the potential impact from new Welsh Government Legislation requiring that Children Looked After requiring residential care, would have to be placed with a non-for-profit organisation or home. The Director clarified that the number of children on the child protection register was different to the number of children who were looked after. With regards to future Welsh Government Legislation, there were two different types of accommodation that would be seen as potentially profit making. They related to independent fostering arrangements and a residential facility. The numbers of placements for the Vale would tend to be between 10 and 15. The Vale of Glamorgan was in the process of completing its own residential facility that would be run by a third sector provider. It was hoped that Welsh Government would allow some exemptions when the new arrangements came in during 2027, with placements made prior being allowed to continue.

In reply to a query regarding the number of members not to have completed a DBS check, the Director advised that the report reflected the position at November 2022, but the current position was that all checks had been completed.

Subsequently, it was

RESOLVED – T H A T the contents of the report be noted.

#### Reason for decision

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

#### 474 FINAL DRAFT VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT 2022/23 (REF) –

The Cabinet reference from 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2023 was presented by the Director of Corporate Resources.

The Director advised that Cabinet had considered comments made by the Governance and Audit Committee and comments made by the Council's Scrutiny Committees.

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Governance and Audit Committee was being asked to review the Final Draft Annual Self-Assessment report for 2022/23 and refer any comments to Cabinet for its consideration on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023.

In being asked to comment, Members of the Governance and Audit Committee raised the following comments and observations:

- Councillor M. Hooper referred to the previous comments made by the Governance and Audit Committee and in particular comments related to accessibility of the report which he held the opposing view particularly as there were complexities around the way that certain opinions were expressed in the report, particularly in relation to a rise in Council Tax and a decrease in services. Councillor Hooper also referred to the sentence relating to Brexit, and he stated that further detail was required around the impact so more depth was required. Councillor Hooper also referred to commentary relating to the development of Hybrid meetings, and he stated that there were some ambiguity to that as the Council was unable to hold a hybrid meeting.
- Councillor E. Goodjohn referred to public engagement stating that he was looking forward to the full data sets and the outcomes of the public opinion survey. Councillor Goodjohn stated that it was important for the Council to communicate with the public around its priorities and critical challenges. In addition, he stated that the Council could do more to promote public understanding of how the Council used its resources and to explain in more detail the delivery of actions as contained in Service Plans. There needed to be an honest assessment of how the Council was using its resources and how it engaged with the public.
- The Chair, Mr. G. Chapman, stated that it was important for the Council to outline to the public that most of its budget was spent on education and social services which meant that along with those departments, it meant that the other service Directorates were facing extreme financial pressures. Therefore, the public may be unaware of where the Council spent its money and also the level of (limited) discretion that the Council had.
- Councillor J. Protheroe referred to agency staff and welcomed that the Director had indicated that a further analysis was underway to better understand how and why the Council spent such a large amount of money on agency staff.
- Councillor J. Norman stated that most people only appreciated the services that they used, and most were unaware of the full range of services that the Council financed. It was therefore important to make the public aware that the Council did not just fund potholes and street lights as there were statutory services that the Council was required to provide.

Having considered the reference from Cabinet it was

RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the report be noted.

No.

(2) T H A T Cabinet be advised of the views of the Governance and Audit Committee, those being:

- Accessibility – that it be clarified that there was an opposing view that the document was easily accessible as it was felt that the document may be difficult to read for some members of the public as there was some complexities around the way that certain opinions were expressed in the report, particularly in relation to a rise in Council Tax and a decrease in services.
- Brexit – for further detail to be included regarding the impact of Brexit or for Cabinet to consider removing this reference.
- Hybrid meetings – for the self-assessment document to reflect that the Council has not implemented a hybrid meeting solution and that this was now an urgent matter to resolve. The second reference in the assessment was felt to be more accurate than the first.
- Public engagement and communication – for commentary to outline to the public how the Council spends its money and the priority areas that the money was allocated to as part of communicating the Assessment and in particular the Council's budget. To also clearly highlight that the majority of the Council's budget (around 75%) was allocated to education and social services which meant that along with those departments, all other service areas were under extreme budget pressures.
- Agency staff – for a detailed in-depth review to be undertaken to understand the how's and why's of the areas that the Council spends on agency staff. For this to be undertaken as part of the development of the Council's budget proposals for 2024/25.

### Reasons for decisions

(1&2) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

### 475 Q2 UPDATE: AUDIT WALES WORK PROGRAMME AND TIMETABLE 2023/24 - VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL (DCR) –

The report was presented by S. Clements (Audit Wales), the purpose of which was to advise Members of the Q2 update of Audit Wales' work programme timetable as aligned to the Vale of Glamorgan Annual Audit Plan 2023/24.

Appendix A to the report outlined Q2 progress on Audit Wales' work programme and timetable as aligned to the Vale of Glamorgan Annual Audit Plan 2023/24.

Governance and Audit Committee Members were requested to review and note the progress made on the Vale of Glamorgan Audit Work Programme as at Q2 and following consideration, refer the report to Cabinet for their oversight.

The Chair queried the timing of the review into financial sustainability, stating that some flexibility may be required given that the Council would be required to set its budget during March. S. Clements stated that the comment had been noted and taken away for consideration.

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Having considered the report, the Committee

RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T the report be referred to Cabinet for their oversight.

Reasons for decisions

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) To enable Cabinet's oversight of the Audit Work Programme.

476 PROGRESS AGAINST EXTERNAL REGULATORY RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVEMENT (SEPTEMBER 2023) (DCR) –

The Director of Corporate Resources, presented the report, the purpose of which was to present progress to date in addressing existing recommendations and improvement proposals from the Council's external regulators.

The report outlined progress to date (September 2023) against all existing external regulatory recommendations and proposals for improvement.

In line with corporate performance management arrangements, consideration was given by relevant Council services to the findings contained within both local and national reports as they were published, and actions had been incorporated within the Council's Strategic Insight Board (SIB) Insight Tracker throughout the year as appropriate. These actions were monitored by the SIB and reported to the Strategic Leadership Team, Scrutiny Committees, Cabinet and the Governance and Audit Committee as work to address them progressed. Progress was also monitored by Audit Wales colleagues throughout the year as part of the Annual Regulatory Plan.

Positive progress had been made in responding to regulatory improvement areas. There were currently 53 actions on-going in the Insight Tracker with 87% of actions (46) attributed a Green performance (RAG) status, 6 an Amber status and 1 a Red status.

Of the 26 actions relating to local regulatory recommendations, 20 had been attributed a Green RAG status, 5 an Amber status and the remaining 1 action attributed a Red status. The action attributed a Red status related to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard review.

There were currently 27 on-going actions in the Insight Tracker relating to national regulatory recommendations of which 26 had been attributed a Green RAG status

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and the remaining 1 action, an Amber status. The action attributed an Amber performance status related to the review of Third Sector Funding.

Of the 26 actions relating to local regulatory work, 7 actions were now considered complete. These related to the review of Outsourced Leisure Services, the Inspection of Youth Services in the Vale and the review of Waste Management. Relevant Scrutiny Committees had considered the SIB Insight Tracker as part of the Annual Delivery Plan quarterly performance reporting at Q1 with Governance and Audit Committee now having oversight in line with the Committee's remit.

Governance and Audit Committee was being asked to review the progress made to date in addressing the recommendations and improvement proposals made by the external regulators as outlined in the SIB Insight Tracker (appended to the report) with any comments and views referred via recommendation to Cabinet.

A reply regarding an update position relating to the action attributed a Red status around the Welsh Housing Quality Standard review, would be sought from the relevant Officer and provided via email.

M. Evans (Lay Member) commented that it would be useful for a priority status to be included to highlight those actions with the highest priorities. The Committee agreed for that to be suggested to Cabinet.

Subsequently, it was

RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T the progress to date in addressing existing recommendations and improvement proposals made by the Council's external regulators be noted.

(2) T H A T Cabinet be asked to consider the recommendation of the Governance and Audit Committee for the inclusion of a Priority Status Tracker.

#### Reasons for decisions

(1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

(2) In order to allow Cabinet to consider a recommendation from the Governance and Audit Committee for the inclusion of a Priority Status Tracker.

#### 477 CALL-IN FOLLOWING INTERNAL AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS NOT YET FULLY IMPLEMENTED (HRIAS) –

The purpose of the report was for Members to be assured by Directors that action was being taken to complete agreed Internal Audit recommendations which had not yet been fully implemented.

No.

The Governance and Audit Committee had a number of core functions and responsibilities within its remit. It received reports and presentations throughout the year to enable it to carry out those core functions and responsibilities effectively and to provide it with confidence in the financial governance of the Authority.

Following the presentation of Internal Audit's Recommendation Monitoring report to the Committee meeting in September, Members required further assurances from the respective Directors that appropriate action was being taken to address recommendations agreed from 2021/22 audit reports but had not yet been fully implemented. The Director of Social Services and the Director of Corporate Resources had therefore been invited into Governance and Audit Committee.

Committee was requested to consider and note the assurances provided by the respective Directors regarding the action being taken to address the Internal Audit recommendations made in 2021/22 which had not yet been fully implemented.

With regards to the recommendation related to Corporate Safeguarding, and the implementation of a record of all staff that had attended the Level 1 safeguarding training, the Director of Social Services advised that the action was now complete and ongoing monitoring would be undertaken by the Corporate Safeguarding Group.

In terms of the two actions relating to Cyber Security, the Director of Corporate Resources advised that the first action for Council-wide training in cyber resilience to be introduced for all staff, was partially complete with training undertaken on a risk-based basis, with a roll out to commence over the next few weeks beginning with Social Services. A training module called 'Cyber Ninjas' was being deployed within ICT services, which would also be available for Elected Members.

With regard to cyber resilience, N. Ireland queried whether there were any actions that the Council could look at prior to the full implementation of the training programme, such as simple hints and tips. The Director of Corporate Resources commented that the Council had continued to communicate hints and tips to staff, which included the promoting of messages relating to the opening of emails. In addition, the Council had introduced some further security functions as a result of Office 365, with staff warned when emailing outside of the organisation.

For the second action, and the introduction of an ICT Cyber Security Strategy, the Director of Corporate Resources confirmed that a strategy document had been drafted and would be presented to the next meeting of the Council's Information Governance Board. It would then be presented to the Council's Strategic Leadership Team, and if necessary, then on to Cabinet.

In terms of the layout of the appendix, Councillor Hooper stated that it would be good if the responsible officer be included. The Head of the Regional Internal Audit Service stated that the request would be accommodated.

It was

No.

RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T the assurances from the respective Directors regarding the action be taken to address the Internal Audit recommendations made in 2021/22 which had not yet been fully implemented be noted.

(2) T H A T the Director of Social Services and the Director of Corporate Resources be advised to provide an update position in relation to Corporate Safeguarding and cyber security at the meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee scheduled for February 2024.

Reasons for decisions

(1&2) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

478 UPDATED FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24 (HRIAS) –

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with a Forward Work Programme for 2023/24.

The Governance and Audit Committee had a number of core functions and responsibilities within its remit. It received reports and presentations throughout the year to enable it to carry out those core functions and responsibilities effectively and to provide it with confidence in the financial governance of the Authority.

To enable the Committee to provide this assurance and to ensure it was covering its range of responsibilities, a Forward Work Programme was presented at each meeting, setting out the reports to be presented at future meetings, for approval or amendment, as necessary.

The updated Forward Work Programme (FWP) for 2023/24 was attached to the report at Appendix A. Changes had been made to reflect decisions made at previous meetings and the inclusion of a Special Meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2023.

Committee was requested to approve the updated FWP or request changes for future meetings.

The Chair commented that it should be noted that both the Director of Social Services and the Director of Corporate Resources would be invited to the February meeting to provide ongoing assurance in relation to Corporate Safeguarding and Cyber Security. In addition, a report on the Stanwell School Capital Project would be brought back to the Committee in due course.

Subsequently, the Committee



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RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the Forward Work Programme be noted.
- (2) T H A T the schedule of items for the meeting scheduled for 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2023 be endorsed.

Reasons for decisions

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) To confirm the schedule of items for the meeting to be held on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2023.