

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

AUDIT & ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE MEETING

Minutes

FRIDAY, 16 FEBRUARY 2024

PRESENT: Councillor M Spooner (Chair)

Councillors C Edwards, K Flunder, A Parkes and D Proudlove

APOLOGIES: Councillors J Cox, M Worthington, N Yates and Mr J Berrisford

32 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

33 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Audit & Accounts Committee held on 1 December 2023 be approved as a correct record

34 **AUDIT FINDINGS REPORT**

A verbal summary of the Audit Findings Reports was delivered to members by representatives from Grant Thornton.

It was noted that the Auditors Annual Report would be presented at the next meeting. It was summarised as having good assurance and there were no areas of concern to note.

It was noted that the Pension Assurance Report had not been provided by the Pension Fund Auditor at the time of this report but would be reviewed once received.

Members were advised that recommendations included in the report had started to be addressed.

It was noted that following the recommendations, further processes were in place to test the effectiveness of the resolutions.

Following a question from a member, it was noted that the audit adjustment detailed on page 34 was included in the PPE section.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

35 **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (AGS)**

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Regulation 6 (1) (a) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 requires the Council to conduct a review each financial year of the effectiveness of its system of internal control and approve an Annual Governance Statement (AGS).

The statement needs to be prepared in accordance with proper practices in relation to accounts and must be approved in advance of the Council approving the statement of accounts. 'Proper practices in relation to accounts' relates to those accounting practices which are contained in a code of practice or other document which is identified for the purposes of this provision by regulations made by the Secretary of State. Such guidance is contained in the CIPFA/SOLACE framework and guidance on 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government'.

It was noted that the impact of Covid had affected the delivery of objectives.

It was further noted that a new "teckal" company had been established as an operating model for capital projects and facilities management services. It was confirmed that meetings were held with the "teckal" company regularly, to ensure standards were maintained and to monitor efficiency.

RESOLVED:

That the committee approved the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23.

36 **STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

The report allowed for the scrutiny of the Statement of Accounts 2022/23, in compliance with the legislative provisions relating to financial reporting and the Council's commitment to transparency and accountability in the stewardship of public funds.

It was noted that within the report a section had been included to answer some common questions that may have arisen.

Following a question from a member regarding Levelling Up and inflation pressures, it was noted that although this had created challenges in project affordability, funding was still available for project completion.

It was further noted that there were no serious and material risk indicators at present and that control systems were in place to deliver these projects. It was confirmed that it was in the remit of other committees to oversee those matters.

RESOLVED:

That the Statement of Accounts 2022/23 be approved subject to the outside work pending from the Pension Auditor.

37 **TREASURY MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

The purpose of the report was to allow the robust scrutiny of the Council's Treasury Management performance in 2023/24 in compliance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management and generally accepted good practice.

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RESOLVED:

That Members noted the current Treasury Management position as at 31st December 2023.

38 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The purpose of the report was to allow members of the Committee to consider and endorse the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25, ensuring that its capital and treasury activities for the next four years were affordable and properly managed.

RESOLVED:

That the Annual Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) 2024/25 was recommended to Council for approval.

39 INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 requires the Council to "undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance". In accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, the Audit Manager must report periodically to the Audit Committee on the internal audit activity's performance relative to its plan.

Members suggested that any issues identified in the report should be accompanied by timescales going forward.

RESOLVED:

That the committee noted the progress information contained within this report.

40 REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT POLICY & PROCEDURES

The Council must have arrangements in place to ensure compliance with the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) and those arrangements are subject to inspection by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO). This was achieved through the adoption of a set of Policy and Procedures that ensured compliance with the requirements of the legislation. The Council has had arrangements and procedures in place for authorising and conducting necessary surveillance since 2002. Councillors should review the use of RIPA and set the policy at least once per year. They should also consider internal reports on use of RIPA periodically to ensure it is being used consistently with the policy and that the policy remains fit for purpose.

It was noted that the legislation had received bad publicity and should be used cautiously.

Members discussed the use and need for covert surveillance in the District.

It was noted that the designated officer details would be amended as appropriate.

RESOLVED:

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1. That the committee noted the Council's use of RIPA powers.
2. That the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 Policy and Procedures attached at **Appendix 1** were approved and adopted.

41 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee was informed that the Knowledge and Skills Framework survey had now been completed by members.

It was suggested that training sessions take place to bridge a skills gap and all councillors be invited to attend.

It was noted that external audits would be received earlier going forward.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

The meeting closed at 11.06 am

_____ Chairman _____ Date