

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE - THURSDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2022

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD IN REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2022 AT 10:00

Present

Mr G Chapman – Chairperson

Mr B Olorunnisola	S J Griffiths	D M Hughes	M L Hughes
A Wathan	A Williams	RM Granville	S J Bletsoe
C Davies			

Apologies for Absence

Ms S Davies and Mr A Bagley

Apologies for Absence due to Council Business

Officers:

Rachel Freitag	Audit Wales
Rachel Keepins	Democratic Services Manager
Carys Lord	Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change
Deborah Exton	Deputy Head of Finance
Samantha Clements	Audit Wales
Nigel Smith	Finance Manager
Eilish Thomas	Finance Manager - Financial Control & Closing
Joan Davies	Deputy Head of Regional Internal Audit Service
Alex Rawlin	Corporate Policy & Public Affairs Manager
Janine Nightingale	Corporate Director - Communities
Kelly Watson	Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services
Lynne Berry	Group Manager Housing & Community Regeneration
Martin Morgans	Head of Performance and Partnership Services
Justin Kingdon	Strategic Asset Management and Investment Manager

Lay Member:

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26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

27. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the 28/07/2022 be approved as a true and accurate record.

28. GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE ACTION RECORD

The Democratic services Manager presented a report which provided Members with an update on the Governance and Audit Committee Action Record.

The Action record was devised to assist the Committee in tracking the decisions made by the Committee in the exercise of its functions. The action record was attached at Appendix A of the report.

The Chairperson stated that there were no Statement of Accounts item and was aware that there may be delays in bringing this item to Committee. He asked for clarification on this.

The Group Manager – Chief Accountant explained that there have been national discussions with CIPFA in the way balances were brought forward in infrastructure assets however these discussions were still ongoing. He agreed to keep the committee updated on this as and when new developments occur.

RESOLVED: The committee noted the Action Record and provide any comment upon this, as appropriate.

29. **OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL LETTER 2021 - 2022**

The Chief Officer Legal & Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy presented a report which updated the Committee on the Ombudsman Annal Letter for 2021-2022.

She advised that the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) was independent of all government bodies and has legal powers to investigate complaints about public services and independent care providers in Wales. They also investigate complaints that Members of local government bodies have breached their authority's Code of Conduct. The Complaints Officer is the Contact Officer for the PSOW and the Monitoring Officer is responsible for liaising with the PSOW regarding Member Code of Conduct complaints

The Chief Officer Legal & Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy provided the numbers of complaints received between the period 2021–2022. Further details were at section 4 of the report. The ombudsman annual letter was attached at appendix A.

A Member asked if the Council when dealing with complaints were looking for resolutions before they went to the Ombudsman. The Chief Officer Legal & Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy explained the complaints procedure and stated that there were often many complaints that were resolved in the early stage and so only a small percentage of the total number received were unresolved or needed to be progressed further.

A Member commented on the complaints procedure and the transparency for the public. He suggested that the information on the Councils website be more clear and easy to understand so that the public do not find it too difficult to use if they wish.

The Chairperson asked if the Corporate Complaints report could be received by the Committee on at the same meeting that the Ombudsman Annual letter report was received. He believed that these reports were both relevant to each other and it would be useful for the Committee to get a complete picture.

A Member asked if there was a way of understanding the cost of complaints in terms of admin work, allocating time and staff etc. He explained that if the process needed changing because of too many staff or too much time was allocated to process complaints, this would give a better understanding of whether the process was robust and suitable.

The Chief Officer Legal & Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy explained that it would be difficult to cost specific service areas' involvement with complaints, however

she agreed to take this matter away and look at it in respect of corporate complaints. She suggested that an Overview and Scrutiny Committee may be able to look at this and provide feedback on the process and a further report be provided to this committee.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Annual Letter attached as Appendix A.

30. **AUDIT WALES GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORTS**

The Audit Manager – Audit Wales presented a report which detailed reports from Audit Wales, including an update on the financial and performance audit work undertaken, and due to be undertaken, by Audit Wales.

She explained that Audit Wales had produced a number of reports for the Governance and Audit Committee to consider, a summary of which were provided at section 4 of the report. These were:

- The Audit Wales Work Programme and Timetable - (Appendix A)
- Springing Forward – Strategic Workforce Management - Bridgend County Borough Council - (Appendix B)
- Springing Forward – Strategic Asset Management - Bridgend County Borough Council - (Appendix C)
- Assurance and Risk Assessment Review - Bridgend County Borough Council - (Appendix D)

In respect of Appendix B, the AW Representative explained that the field work took place in December 2021/January 2022. The aim of the review was to see how the Council were strategically planning for the use of its workforce, how it monitored this, as well as reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of these arrangements. She added that the main point to highlight was that the Council was acting and responding to the workforce issues which was particularly evident during the start of the pandemic and the need for redeployment of staff and shift in work to work through the challenges.

The AW Representative highlighted the recommendations following the review, which were outlined in Appendix B of the report.

A Member stated that it was clear there were many plans in flight at the moment, however it would be useful for the Committee to have a catalogue of the more strategic plans to ensure that the Committee were able to see the position we are in as an authority.

The Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change suggested that the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee in conjunction with the Governance & Audit Committee on a 6 monthly basis may be the most suitable way to monitor the plans and ensure that the deadlines were adhered to.

The AW Representative highlighted the recommendations following the review, which were outlined in Appendix C of the report. She highlighted a typo in recommendation 1 of the appendix which should read 'strategic asset management planning' instead.

A Member asked in relation to the 2030 decarbonisation strategy, how as a Council do we focus on making changes and ensuring that we are on target, given the cost of living crisis and the fact that many changes take a number of years to implement.

The Corporate Director Communities agreed that the years ahead would be challenging, but it was a corporate target and needed more exposure to raise awareness. Discussions had been ongoing to see what more can be done and one of the points that had been brought up was to decide whether a wellbeing objective should include the 2030 strategy. There had also been lots of work done on the heat network and that was still ongoing. The Cabinet Member Communities now sits on the 2030 Programme Board to ensure that the conversations were fed directly back to Cabinet for a more streamlined approach from that angle. In terms of Local Authorities, Bridgend CBC was also seen as being at the forefront of decarbonisation however there was still more work to be done.

A Member suggested that this board was looked at by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a way of monitoring the performance on a regular basis.

The Chair commented on schools being a large part of the carbon footprint and asked if they were consulted on issues. The Corporate Director Communities stated that schools as well as young learners were the future generation and were ideal advocates for promoting as well as making changes that can contribute to decarbonisation. She added that Refit was a scheme that was undertaken in many schools which allowed for energy cost savings and decarbonisation over a period of time.

Members expressed their opinions on what level of concern they placed on the recommendations. A vote was carried out to determine whether the committee noted the report with concern, or severe concern. The vote was not carried and therefore the Committee:

RESOLVED: That with some concern, the Committee noted the Audit Wales Governance and Audit Committee Reports at Appendices A, B, C and D

31. **PORTHCAWL HARBOUR RETURN 2021-22 ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER**

The Group Manager Chief Accountant presented a report which provided the appointed Auditor's Annual Audit Letter 2021-22 for Porthcawl Harbour, attached as Appendix A, for noting.

He explained that the return was certified on 26 September 2022, confirming that the audit of the annual return had been completed. He confirmed that No amendments were made.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Annual Audit Letter at Appendix A.

32. **DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT - PROGRESS REPORT AND POSITION STATEMENT**

The Head of Partnership Services presented a report which updated the Governance and Audit Committee on actions taken to progress improvements to the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) service and provided information on the position to date. He provided background to the report as set out in section 3.

The Head of Partnership Services explained that a number of risks that were identified in paragraph 3.4 of the report had affected the speed of change and required a number of

mitigating actions to manage. Details of the progress and risks were highlighted at section 4 of the report.

A Member asked in relation to the cost element of the grants. He asked that if someone applied for the grant, was there a risk of the works not being able to be completed to their requirement and therefore a lesser service provided. The Head of Partnership Services explained that the work carried out was predominantly within the cost range of £7,500 and £12,500, so there was a range to work with. The difficulty was that the cost of goods and services has risen over the last few years and therefore the challenge was to stick within the range but the capacity was there to provide more where needed.

A Member commented on the time delay in residents receiving grant money. He mentioned that residents often waited 12 months or more to receive money that was granted and asked that as an authority we were mindful of the delays and worked to improve them, particularly at a time where people need it most. The Head of Partnership Services highlighted that the services being brought in house will allow greater control of the process and the aspiration was to improve the speed in which grant money is provided as well as contractors sought out to carry out work. He added that a framework was being developed in time for the next financial year which would streamline the process further. A Member added that the DFGs process was on the long term Forward Work Programme for Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairperson asked where BCBC is in comparison to other authorities when dealing with DFGs. The Head of Partnership Services stated that Bridgend was in the bottom quartile, with the hope of by the next year Bridgend would be in the middle of the list in terms of wait time DFGs for the residents. He added that many of the more complex DFGs were skewing the figure and some of the work being done was to break down the wait times into small, medium and longer term work.

The Chairperson asked if the aspirations were unreasonable and/or unobtainable. The Head of Partnership Services explained that pre pandemic these aspirations were believed to be achievable but the last 2 years had proven to be difficult to achieve these goals but were not unreasonable for the future.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the progress to date to improve the DFG service and current position.

33. **CORPORATE SELF ASSESSMENT**

The Corporate Policy and Public Affairs Manager presented a report which updated the Committee on the Council's corporate self assessment report, as required by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, and sought comments on the report in Appendix 1.

She provided background to the Committee as set out in section 3 of the report. She explained that Powys Council had already published their self assessment which had proven insightful to learn from and this had been reflected in our Councils self assessment report.

The Corporate Policy and Public Affairs Manager explained that Welsh Government had directed local authorities away from conducting formal consultation / engagement on the self-assessment report. They would prefer to see a summary of key engagement / consultation work over the year, relating to the well-being objectives. This feedback has been integrated into the draft report. Further information was at section 4 of the report.

The Chairperson questioned whether it's feasible to complete the amount of tasks/priorities that have been highlighted in the appendix. The Corporate Policy and

Public Affairs Manager agreed that the tasks were overwhelming and many of them have been identified as new. She added that discussions were being held with key officers to look at the improvement plan and how best to group the tasks and present the results in a way that was appropriate for the committee to look at.

A Member commented on the 'Help people & communities be healthy & resilient' and asked that the Social Services marker be highlighted as unsatisfactory so that the committee can have a better understanding of the challenges being faced.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Reviewed and provided any recommendations for change to the corporate self assessment report 2021-22.

34. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2022-23**

The Deputy Head of Finance presented a report which sought approval for the updated Forward Work Programme for 2022-23.

In order to assist the Committee in ensuring that due consideration is given to all aspects of their core functions the proposed updated Forward Work Programme for 2022-23 was attached at Appendix A. Committee Members are asked to endorse this schedule, confirm the list of people they would like to invite for each item (if appropriate), and indicate whether any additional information or research is required.

She added that the items scheduled to be presented at the next meeting on 10 November 2022 were as followed:

- 1 Governance and Audit Committee Action Record
- 2 Audit Wales Governance and Audit Committee Reports
- 3 Audited Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement
- 4 Half Year Review of the Annual Governance Statement 2022-23
- 5 Internal Audit Progress Reports
- 6 Internal Audit Recommendation Monitoring Report
- 7 Treasury Management Half Year Report 2022-23
- 8 Corporate Risk Assessment 2022-23
- 9 Updated Forward Work Programme 2022-23

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered and approved the updated Forward Work Programme for 2022-23.

35. **URGENT ITEMS**

None

The meeting closed at Time Not Specified