

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held in COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, RUTHIN AND BY VIDEO CONFERENCE on Tuesday, 4 October 2022 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Ellie Chard and Mark Young

Lay Members Nigel Rudd and Dave Stewart

Cabinet Member – Councillor Gwyneth Ellis – Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets.

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Governance and Business – Monitoring Officer (GW), Head of Finance and Property Services (Section 151 Officer) (SG), Corporate Director for Communities (NS), Chief Internal Auditor (BC), Senior Corporate Health & Safety Advisor (DR), Interim Head of Service - Strategy & Performance, Projects, Climate Change, Community Development, Internal Audit (NK), Head of Childrens Service (RM), Service Manager (LA), Committee Administrator (SLW) (Zoom Host) and Committee Administrator (SJ).

Audit Wales representative Gwilym Bury was also in attendance.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Justine Evans, Carol Holliday, Merfyn Parry and Elfed Williams.

Apologies from Lay Member Paul Whitham were received.

David Roberts informed committee he was present to present agenda item 6 on behalf of Gerry Lappington who sent his apologies.

2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Nominations were sought for a Member to serve as the Committee's Vice Chair for the ensuing year. Lay Member David Stewart nominated Councillor Mark Young, seconded by Councillor Ellie Chard. No other nominations were received and it was therefore;

RESOLVED that Councillor Mark Young be appointed as the Governance and Audit Committee's Vice Chair for the ensuing year.

3 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Ellie Chard informed the committee she had been a member on the Council's Health and Safety committee and Performance Scrutiny Committee both of which are noted in reports within the agenda. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that member's past committee commitments did not need to be noted as an interest as they were internal committees of the Authority.

The Chair, Lay Member David Stewart declared a personal interest as he was also a member of Wrexham Council's Governance and Audit committee and some of the information may relate to that Authority.

4 URGENT MATTERS

There were no urgent items.

5 MINUTES

The minutes of the Governance and Audit committee held on 27 July 2022 were submitted.

Matter arising –

Page 8 – Minutes – Internal Audit questionnaires had not yet begun to be issued quarterly. The internal auditor who issued the surveys was currently on long term sick. The task would be reallocated to another member of staff if required.

Page 8 – Minutes – It was confirmed Treasury Management training had been scheduled for 28th October to be presented by Arling Close. It was confirmed WLGA had provided an e-learning module that related to the work of the committee. A date would be set for a training session before the next meeting.

Page 11 – Draft Statement of Accounts – It was confirmed no significant concerns had been raised during the audit stage of the process.

RESOLVED, subject to the above that the minutes of the Governance and Audit committee held on 27 July 2022 be received and approved as a correct record.

6 ANNUAL CORPORATE HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT

The Senior Corporate Health & Safety Advisor guided members through the annual Corporate Health and Safety report (previously circulated).

The first section of the report included the assessment of the health and safety performance in terms of how the culture works, a medium assurance rating had been provided a continuous improvement track from previous years.

Throughout the financial year 2021\2022 only one RIDDOR incident had been formally investigated by the HSE. This incident related to four customers of Ruthin leisure centre receiving an electric shock in the showers. The outcome was fairly minor and the regulator found no fault with DCC or the utility supplier.

Denbighshire County Council continued to be assessed by Corporate Health & Safety as being an organisation that sits in the “calculative and proactive” zone.

Members were guided through the points to note during 2021-2022 within the agenda papers. A breakdown of accidents and incidents was available in Appendix 2 to the paper.

The Chair thanked the officer for the detailed papers and explanation of the team and findings over the year. In response to the members questions, officers expanded on the following:

- It was confirmed during the year, there were 2 fatalities. Both had been residents in care homes. The fatalities were not reportable to RIDDOR.
- Officers agreed to provide further details on specific concerns members had.
- The high number of incidents reported by Denbighshire leisure were due to Denbighshire Leisure Limited reporting and recording any incident or accident. A number of the recording were very minor.
- The report was also presented to the Joint Consultative Committee for Health and Safety and Employee Relations on a quarterly basis. This meeting was robust and offered challenge to the figures and health and safety. The reports were also forwarded to the senior leadership team. The corporate risk register was also reported to the Corporate Executive Team.
- Internal Audit would conduct an audit of the service as part of its programme of works.

The Chair thanked the officers for all the detailed papers and the response to members questions.

RESOLVED that, the Governance and Audit Committee receive the report, note its contents and endorse the Corporate Health and Safety Team Work plan for 2021/22.

7 CARE INSPECTORATE WALES - INSPECTION OF INTAKE AND INTERVENTION SERVICE 2021

The Head of Children's Services introduced the report to members (previously circulated) stating an assurance check had been conducted by CIW in June/ July 2021. In that review a number of positive findings had been reported there was also a number of areas for improvement. An action plan was created to improve on those areas of concern.

The follow up inspection highlighted some areas of improvement, but recognised the impact of a high number of vacancies across the service that impacted the improvement journey. Staff retention and recruitment was seen as a national concern.

Regular meetings with CIW to review the actions taken in line with the action plan continued. Officers recognised there was still work that was required to improve the area within service.

Confirmation that staff training in all aspects of the area continued. It was felt that although the department had staffing concerns training was always prioritised.

During the discussion the officers provided further explanation on the following:

- In house training on 'real life' situations had taken place. These were weekly 'practice and improvement sessions' to discuss different services available for staff in the area.
- Recruitment and retention had been escalated to be included on the Corporate Risk in Denbighshire. Regular meetings to address the issue took place. As an employer Denbighshire had looked at the offers for working for the authority. A lot of behind the work scenes was taking place both regionally and within Denbighshire. A national pay structure had been called for.
- Members thanked the officers for the continued dedication and hard work.
- Prioritising child protection referrals has continued. A number of social workers across over areas of the department had been called in to support the area. The gateway team (initial team) had been strengthened which had subsequently reduced the number of caseload slightly.
- Each authority across the region had been experiencing difficulties to fulfil statutory duties. Officers priority had been to ensure the statutory duties of Denbighshire where met, supporting children and vulnerable adult's resident in Denbighshire. It was noted the pandemic had created a more flexible working approach for social workers. It was noted that Denbighshire social workers continued to meet with individuals and families in the community.
- Recruitment and retention was a regular item of discussion at the Corporate Executive Team meetings. An internal group had been set up to address recruitment and retention in the care sector. It was also highlighted a report had been presented to Performance Scrutiny around sickness and turnover statistics as an authority as a whole. Members were informed a recruitment specialist had been recruitment in HR to aid social care recruitment.
- A future report on recruitment and retention would be beneficial for members to monitor recruitment and retention as an authority as a whole. It was confirmed an internal audit report was scheduled for the last quarter.
- Members suggested an overarching report be presented at the earliest convenience on workforce planning at the January committee meeting.
- An information report on the challenges of recruitment in Social Care was agreed to be presented at the November committee meeting.

Members of the committee thanked the officers for the detailed report.

RESOLVED that the Committee considers the CIW findings letter and understands the areas for improvement. It was agreed to receive an information report on recruitment and retention in the social care sector in November. Members also agreed to receive a report on workforce planning in January. Members also noted the Internal Audit report on Retention that would be presented in the new year.

8 AUDIT WALES REPORT - DELIVERING SUSTAINED PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

The Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets along with the Interim Head of Head of Business Improvement and Modernisation introduced the Audit Wales report (previously circulated).

Members were informed included in the papers was the Audit Wales report included recommendations made by Audit Wales and the responses by officers of the actions to be taken against those recommendations.

Audit Wales took an in-depth review of the Authorities performance in 2021. It was explained they had looked at systems and processes in place with a deeper look at the arrangements for education and young people and environmental services both which were linked to corporate priorities at the time. Overall the conclusion was that Denbighshire had effective arrangements in place for its performance management.

Members were guided through the recommendations suggested by Audit Wales and the manager response that had been included in the agenda papers including the timescale for each recommendation.

The Audit Wales representative drew attention to recommendation 3, improving the availability of performance information to members and the public. It was noted the difficulties services had seen during the Covid 19 pandemic and it was hoped following the ease of restrictions this would be improved.

Following the introduction, the following was discussed in further detail:

- The report was published by Audit Wales in January 2022, although officers would have hoped to present to committee at an earlier opportunity due to the pandemic it had been delayed. Members were reminded the Council election had taken place which had also contributed to the delay. Audit Wales had no concern with the timescale.
- HR are responsible for 1:1. There is a template for managers to follow and complete. It was a thorough template that included work objectives and general wellbeing of employees. The minimum requirement for the vast majority of staff was three to be completed during a year, this target was often exceeded by managers and offered more regularly. HR issued reports for managers to address any concerns. The reports are created monthly.
- It was often logging of the 1:1 on the system that was not completed.
- The importance of comparative information nationally and regionally was stressed. Comparative information shared nationally had been suspended during the pandemic. It was hoped this would be reinstated so the authority could compare its performance against other authorities.
- Bench marking had declined during the pandemic it was hoped this would increase going forward and allow services to compare to other authority's performance.

RESOLVED that;

- i. The Committee confirmed it had read, understood and taken account of the content and recommendations in the Audit Wales report on Delivering Sustained Performance Improvement and;*
- ii. That the Committee noted the agreed actions in the management response.*

At this juncture (11.20 a.m.) there was a 10 minute comfort break.

The meeting reconvened at 11.30 am.

9 INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE

The Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets along with the Chief Internal Auditor (CIA) introduced the report (previously circulated). Members were updated on the Internal Audit Team's progress in terms of its service delivery, assurance provision, reviews completed, performance and effectiveness in driving improvement.

The report provided information on work carried out by Internal Audit since the last committee meeting. It allowed the committee to monitor Internal Audit's performance and progress as well as providing summaries of Internal Audit reports. Also included was a summary of the changes to the structure of Internal Audit for members reference.

Confirmation that 8 Audits had been completed since the last committee meeting. The completed audits had all received a high or medium assurance. There had been two follow up reviews completed since the last update and summaries were included for information. One of the follow ups was presented to the Partnership Scrutiny Committee July 2022. A National Fraud Incentive review had also been completed by the audit team.

Details of the team and its make up were provided to the committee. It was hoped that approval to appoint a senior auditor would be approved and go out to recruitment. The team had also had a member of staff on long term absence.

The Chair thanked the Lead Member and Chief Internal Officer for the detailed introduction.

During the discussion –

- It was confirmed an audit of revenues and benefits for 2022/23 was due to commence.
- In regards to the Equalities report it stated within reason the council was compliant. Included had been three actions to be addressed. Once the three actions had been resolved the audit team would be satisfied. The actions had been given a timescale to be completed before a follow up review. The findings of follow up reviews would be included in update reports presented to Governance and Audit committee.
- Confirmation that the first meeting of Equality forum was due to take place the end of October 2022. A national report had been produced by Audit Wales on Equality of impact assessments, identifying issues found locally are also found nationally.
- Compliments to the Audit team staff for quick responses to members questions was highlighted. Members wanted to thank the team for providing feedback on concerns outside of the meeting.
- The work programme was constantly reviewed. Not having a full complement of staff has impacted the number of audits completed. Reviews of how to work more effectively going forward was being conducted. Audits are reviewed and the order of completion is prioritised in order of importance.

- Audit of City, Town and Community Councils are beneficial for the authority.
- Audit Wales congratulated Internal audit for the work completed in schools and community councils. It was felt to be an important piece of work.
- Reference numbers could be included on the report.
- A number of areas fall under the Financial Services area such as payroll and treasury management.
- Members were pleased to note the process of recovering the overpayments found on the NFI had begun.
- Officers felt North & Mid Wales Audit Partnership sub-group were very beneficial. It allowed discussions on possibilities and ways to prevent fraud. It was hoped the group would help share experiences and expertise.
- A review of the guidance documents for project management had been conducted. The importance of establishing boards very early in a project was stressed.

Confirmation that a planned audit of Christ the Word Catholic School in Rhyl was scheduled following the recent Estyn review. Audit would review and go through the action plan that has been agreed by the Education department.

RESOLVED that, members note the Internal Audit's progress and performance.

10 GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Governance and Audit Committee's Forward Work Programme (FWP) was presented for consideration (previously circulated).

The Monitoring Officer confirmed the committee was responsible for receiving the Annual panel assessment report and Complaints report. He stated he would discuss with relevant officers for when it was best for the committee to receive the reports.

The Chair requested if any changes to the forward work programme are made before the meeting if he could be informed.

The Chief Internal Auditor confirmed a report including Audit reports including external regulatory reports was to be submitted to CET. It would include progress against any recommendations. He confirmed he could share the report on an information basis to members.

The Chair informed members the Annual Fire Safety report was scheduled for the September committee meeting. Due to the meeting being rescheduled officers were unable to attend the new meeting date. If members were in agreement the report could be circulated via email to members. The Monitoring Officer encouraged members to raise any matters with the report author. Members were all in agreement to receive the report via email.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed the 'Draft Annual report' would be presented to the committee in November for consideration. An officer would prepare a draft report for committee to confirm they agree the contents before it is presented to Full

Council. He stated it was standard practice the Chair of the Committee along with Lead Officer would present the report to County Council.

Members had agreed a report in January 2023 on Workforce Planning Recruitment and Retention be included on the forward work programme. It was also agreed an information report from Nicola Stubbins on the challenges in recruitment and retention found in Social Care be included on the November meeting.

RESOLVED that, subject to the inclusion of the above addition the Governance and Audit Committee's forward work programme be noted.

FOR INFORMATION

11 ESTYN INSPECTION REPORT - CHRIST THE WORD CATHOLIC SCHOOL

The Corporate Director: Governance and Business, Monitoring Officer introduced the Estyn Inspection report for Christ the Word Catholic School (previously circulated).

The Chair asked the direction of the report and if the committee would receive assurance from future reports on the progress of actions.

Members were informed the report was in the Performance Scrutiny's forward work programme to be scrutinised. A representative from GwE would be invited to that meeting along with the Catholic diocese head of education, the school head teacher and Chair of the school's governing body. The scrutiny committee will receive and debate the response action plan and establish a regular monitoring plan.

The Governance and Audit committee will receive updates through the work of Internal Audit but if they felt necessary could call a report back to the committee. The Chief Internal Auditor confirmed he would inform the committee following future Estyn reports and his internal audit work.

RESOLVED that the Governance and Audit committee note the information report.

The meeting concluded at 12.28 p.m.