

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 Wednesday, 24 July 2024 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Lay Members - David Stewart (Chair), Nigel Rudd, and Paul Whitham

Councillors James Elson, Bobby Feeley, Carol Holliday, Arwel Roberts and Mark Young (Vice-Chair)

ALSO PRESENT

Gary Williams – Corporate Director: Governance and Business / Monitoring Officer; Liz Thomas (Head of Finance and Audit (Section 151 Officer); Bob Chowdhury – Chief Internal Auditor; Nicola Stubbins - Corporate Director: Social Services and Education; Jenny Williams, Strategic Director Social Care and Education; Anest Gray Frazer, Service Manager, Conwy and Denbighshire Youth Justice Service; Dawn Anderson, Childcare and Play Development Manager, Craig Taylor Childcare supervisor, Katie Newe, Service Manager: Care and Support, and Responsible Individual (RI) Ann Lloyd, Head of Adult Social Care and Homelessness, Kath Jones, Senior Committee Administrator; and Rhodri Tomos-Jones, Committee Administrator.

Councillor Elen Heaton, Lead Member for Health, and Social Care and Councillor Gwyneth Ellis, Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets

Charles Rigby – Audit Wales representative

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ellie Chard.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Arwel Roberts declared a personal interest as he was a board member for Menter Iaith Sir Ddinbych and had a close working relation with Urdd gobaith Cymru.

Councillor Arwel Roberts, declared a personal interest as he was a recipient of a Clwyd Pension fund pension.

Lay Member, Nigel Rudd, declared a personal interest as he was a member of the Conwy County Borough Council Governance and Audit Committee.

Lay Member, Paul Whitham, declared a personal interest as he was a recipient of a Clwyd Pension fund pension.

The Chair, Lay Member, David Stewart, declared a personal interest as he was a recipient of a Clwyd Pension fund pension.

3 URGENT MATTERS

Before the meeting, the chair requested an update regarding the new waste management rollout. The questions which were raised were the following –

1. The financial impact of rectification and investigation on this year's Budget and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
2. The effectiveness of the Council's project management arrangements. For the Transformation agenda to deliver there must be confidence in these.
3. Scrutiny—If questions were being asked as to whether the roll-out of the new system was subject to adequate Scrutiny, then assurance was needed that Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs (SCVC) were made aware of such decisions and timescales and enabled to decide what goes to Scrutiny Committees based on the risks involved.
4. Investigation Terms of Reference—If the rollout was to be subject to an independent investigation, then GAC should have seen and been able to comment on the terms of reference before they were agreed upon.
5. The impact on corporate management morale.

The Corporate Director: Governance and Business / Monitoring Officer (MO) responded to the questions.

It was clarified that the financial impact of the matter was not yet fully visualised; however, when the details were available, they would be shared with elected and lay members.

The MO understood the matter was complex, and many issues had arisen during the rollout. However, assurances were given that the governance of the new model had been given and that additional resources had been allocated to alleviate the impact the new waste model had had on residents.

The committee were informed that SCVCs had discussed the rollout of the waste model and the terms of reference; they had agreed to discuss the terms of reference at the next meeting in September, which would then allow further discussion and an external investigation could be looked into, this process would also be used as a lessons learned exercise on the whole matter which they could be used for other large projects the council would be rolling out.

Members of the Governance and Audit Committee (GAC) queried whether they could be included as much as they could in the process, especially with regards to the terms of reference; the MO had no issues with the GAC having an overview of the process, the matter would be dealt with robustly and as transparent as possible. The matter of governance was vital as there was a transformation agenda with some large change projects; the authority must be confident in those arrangements moving forward.

The morale of all involved was discussed. The MO clarified that the matter was complex and challenging for all involved. The important thing was that all involved worked together to ensure the matter was dealt with as quickly as possible, and a complete and thorough review of the rollout was carried out to learn lessons from the process.

Members discussed the following further –

- The matter of what the SCVC chairs group had discussed previously and the understanding of some members that the matter would be addressed in a public enquiry. The MO clarified that the group had agreed to meet again and discuss the cost of an independent enquiry based on the draft terms of reference before proceeding with any decision; the MO wanted to ensure that members were more cautious with the terminology used, especially regarding enquiries; however, wanted to reassure the committee that members would be steering the decisions taken.
- The process and how information on such matters was conveyed to lay members moving forward; members were happy for the matter to be discussed further outside of the meeting; lay members believed this matter needed to be ironed out. The communication strategy was raised, and what policy had the council adopted three stages of the waste rollout: the before, the during and the after stages of the project. The MO stated that there was a large amount of communication before the rollout, that there had been communication throughout the rollout, and that when the issues were dealt with, there would be constant communication with all stakeholders. The MO clarified that the council aimed to be open and transparent with all involved throughout the process. Members were grateful for the response and highlighted that the communication should be reviewed for the lessons learnt.
- Members raised that the damage to the council's reputation needed to be addressed once the matter was dealt with.
- The committee raised the need for safeguarding for staff members who were dealing with the situation. The MO clarified that if staff members had issues, they should raise them through their managers and HR.
- The committee suggested summarising the matters and taking them to the September SCVC meeting; the MO stated that they would be included in the next meeting.

RESOLVED *the urgent matters raised by the chair were noted.*

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Governance and Audit Committee (GAC) meeting held on 12 June 2024 were presented for consideration.

Matters of accuracy –

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- Page 8—Councillor Holliday noted that Ysgol Clawdd Offa should be included in her declaration. She also raised the issue of her name being misspelt.

- Page 9—The third paragraph raised matters arising regarding not having Cabinet members on the GAC; it needed to be extended to state that the monitoring officer (MO) stated that the matter was allowable under the legislation. However, Denbighshire’s constitution was against the matter; however, there was a presence from the Cabinet at the meeting through lead members being present.

Matters arising –

- Page 9—The Head of Finance, Liz Thomas, had contacted Arlingclose to provide alternative contact details outside of the Finance department should the need arise, but they had not issued a written response to confirm what had been previously discussed. They were aware of the expectations of the Council, and the chair of the GAC believed it would be good to have a response in writing from them.
- Page 9—Lay Member Nigel Rudd stated he had been experiencing issues with his email. He raised a point at the bottom of page 9, which was a comment on page 11/12, but he wanted to know if the Medium-Term Financial strategy and update had been circulated. The head of finance had not circulated the information but would circulate it as quickly as possible.
- Page 17: Members queried whether the Head of Service, Emlyn Jones, had contacted him regarding the service challenge; Nigel Rudd confirmed he had not heard anything relating to the matter. The MO would investigate the matter for the GAC.
- Page 18—When the issue of schools not inputting data onto Verto was raised, it was queried whether a system like Verto was used, which Audit could investigate. Bob Chowdhury, Chief Internal Auditor (CIA), was not aware of such a system; however, he would investigate the matter further.
- Page 20—Regarding the CAG forward work programme, officers stated that work was ongoing. The CIA was working on the matter of whether the new dates for 2025 would be included in the new programme. Data from the previous year was included to ensure the work programme was robust. The forward work programme would be sent to the next Scrutiny chairs and vice chairs group before being included at the September meeting.
- Page 15—The report relating to town plans and the potential delay was raised, which was included in the council’s self-assessment; the MO would discuss the matter raised by Councillor Roberts with the relevant officers.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the minutes of the Governance and Audit Committee held on 12 June 2024, be received and approved as a correct record.

5 CONWY AND DENBIGHSHIRE YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICES

Nicola Stubbins, the Corporate Director of Social Services and Education (CDSSE), presented the Conwy and Denbighshire Youth Justice Services report (previously circulated). The report focused on feedback on the recently published His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation Inspection of Conwy and Denbighshire Youth Justice Service (previously circulated).

The CDSSE introduced Jenny Williams, Strategic Director of Social Care and Education, and Anest Gray Frazer, Service Manager, Conwy and Denbighshire Youth Justice Service, and conveyed apologies from Rhian Morrille, Head Of Children's Service, who could not attend.

Youth Justice was a multi-agency partnership that delivered youth justice services in terms of Preventative intervention, out-of-court disposals, and Statutory court-ordered intervention to children and young people aged 10-17. The statutory youth justice partners were local authorities, police, probation, and health; the Crime and Disorder Act required those statutory partners to cooperate and coordinate the provision. The Conwy and Denbighshire Youth Justice Service is a dual Local Authority Multi-disciplinary service.

Conwy was the host authority, so the day-to-day line management of the service fell to them. However, Anest, the Service Manager, was a member of the Management Team within Social Services for both local authorities; she attends Denbighshire's Children's Services Management Team meetings and has direct access to Rhian and all our service managers. Anest also sits on the Conwy and Denbighshire Community Safety Partnership.

The Youth Justice Management Board, chaired by Jenny Williams, provides the service's governance. The Board meets quarterly. All statutory partners, the third sector, and HM Courts and Tribunals Service were represented at a senior or Head of Service level. New terms of reference and a management board induction programme have recently been agreed.

The Youth Justice Management Board also has strategic links to the Community Safety Partnership Board for Conwy and Denbighshire, the North Wales Safeguarding Children Board, the North Wales Criminal Justice Board, the North Wales Vulnerability Board, and the North Wales Area Planning Board. A Youth Justice Operational Board has been set up to oversee the delivery of the Youth Justice Improvement Plan and operational practice.

Inspection:

This inspection report was presented to Conwy's Social Care Scrutiny on 17 July and would be sent to CCBC G&A. DCC requires all regulatory inspection reports to be presented to the G&A Committee in the first instance. This committee can recommend that Scrutiny consider the report in more detail.

The Conwy and Denbighshire Youth Justice Joint Inspection was a two-week fieldwork inspection that took place from January 15th to 19th and then from February 29th to March 2nd.

HMI Probation led the Inspection; however, during the second week, those Inspectors were joined by Care Inspectorate Wales, Health Inspectorate Wales, His Majesty Inspectorate of Police, Fire and Rescue and Estyn, and they all contributed to the inspection judgements; this was the first joint Inspection of a Youth Justice Service in Wales for several years and the last given that the Inspection Framework within HMIP was changing to a new Inspection Framework at the end of the Year.

During the first week, a team of inspectors from HMI Probation assessed the quality of practice in a representative sample of statutory cases that had been running for the past 12 months. For the second week, the HMIP Inspectors were joined by inspectors from partner inspectorates to explore and further understand the findings from the first week and to assess the quality of the partnership and the specific role of Partners in delivering intervention within their respective agencies to meet the needs of children and young people within the Youth Justice Services in Conwy and Denbighshire.

Of the 12 areas rated - 2 were deemed inadequate: Governance and leadership and Partnerships and services.

It is important to note that when the Inspection refers to aspects of Governance and Leadership, they refer to the arrangements within the more comprehensive strategic partnership, not internal to the YJS service. The leadership team has been instrumental in shaping the work of the service and the board. As a result, staff have been able to hold complex cases despite the absence of partnership workers embedded in the service.

As a Joint Service, the Management Board was fully aware of the challenges and issues facing service delivery, given the significant staffing and operational challenges the Service had faced over the 21 months. In that sense, there were no shocks. The Inspectors commended the Interim Managers within the Operational Service and commended them on their work. They recognised the improvements already implemented and were assured of their understanding and recognition of the challenge areas.

Seven recommendations have been made:

The Conwy and Denbighshire Management Board should:

1. Undertake a detailed needs analysis to inform the Board and Partnership of the Services that need to be provided within the YJS
 2. Make sure that there are effective information-sharing agreements with the virtual school so that children can access services without delay
 3. Monitor children's access to partnership services and address any barriers promptly
 4. The Heads of Children Services should make sure Services contribute effectively to keeping YJS children and young people safe and well by providing representation at the Court decision-making panel, Training Social Workers to understand their roles and responsibilities when co-working cases with YJS, and contributing to effective joint assessment and planning.
- Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board should:

5. Provide expedited access to Health Services for YJS children, which, as a minimum, should include speech, language and communication services, physical and Sexual health services, and emotional and mental health services. The National Probation Service should:
6. Provide a mandated Probation Worker for the YJS and make Interim arrangements to support YJS staff with risk management until the vacancy can be filled. Careers Wales should:
7. Provide adequate and accessible post-16 information advice and guidance to all children in the YJS who require it. An improvement plan has been agreed upon, and members, you have this within your pack. The plan was comprehensive and responded to the recommendations and findings within the inspection. It also merged some of the aspirational developments required to achieve outstanding service. The service already had an action plan in place following a management board developmental day held in October 2023, which the Youth Justice Board facilitated, and this has also been merged into the improvement plan.

Much of the work has commenced, and some actions have already been completed. e.g. the appointment of a New Service Manager, Review of the Board Membership, creation of a new Management Structure and joint working arrangements. There were ongoing challenges regarding Health and Probation and their ability to meet their statutory function and responsibilities. A Youth Justice Operational Board has been set up with representatives of all the Partner Agencies to oversee the delivery of the Youth Justice Improvement Plan and operational practice, to monitor further, and to ensure that all deliver improvements. It was clear that this Improvement plan depended on all statutory partners represented within the Multi-disciplinary Service working together to ensure that they fulfil their statutory and partnership responsibilities.

The committee discussed the following further –

- The committee acknowledged that the report did not contain good news; however, good comments ran throughout the report. The committee sought reassurance that the actions identified within the report would be carried out. The committee was informed that the actions would be handled by the board and reported to the justice board and the HIMP.
- The officers clarified that the main point of concern within the report was that the partnership work was not working as it should, that getting the relevant information was difficult, and that the concerns were from the health board and the probation team. The officers wanted to clarify that the work had been praised overall; however, as previously stated, the main issues were the two board members.
- The Governance and Audit committee queried whether any methods could be used to encourage attendance at the board meetings, especially from those who do not attend regularly; the committee was assured that work was ongoing.
- Both members and officers also acknowledged the challenges facing the sector/service due to resource and staff retention and hiring.
- The committee suggested the matter could be discussed at a relevant scrutiny committee to identify any issues and whether further assistance

could be given to the service. The monitoring officer (MO) informed the committee members they were welcome to discuss the matter as a scrutiny committee, following the procedure with the request form and scrutiny chairs and vice chairs. However, external organisations were not compelled to attend those meetings; they could be requested.

- The committee queried the budget for the service. Officers responded, stating that they had information relating to the report but did not easily have those figures. However, with all contributions from all the board members, the budget was roughly £1.5 million.
- Members queried the action plan, which was included within the report pack (pages 57-60). The query was regarding the provision of expedited health services and whether the action had been completed; the work was ongoing on the matter. Regarding the Make Sure Children Services contribution effectively to keeping YJS children and young people safe (page 63), the committee was informed that the matter had been resolved.
- The committee queried the chief inspector's meeting with the chief executives and its conclusions. Officers clarified that, overall, it was a good meeting. The main concern was the partnership arrangements; the worst-case scenario if the matter wasn't resolved would be the service being deemed inadequate and a total change needing to be carried out.

The chair suggested that the committee add a recommendation: 'The Governance and Audit committee request that the Denbighshire Youth Justice Service board and partnership be discussed at the relevant scrutiny committee.' The proposal was agreed to by the committee.

RESOLVED that –

1. *The committee confirms it has read the understood and taken account of the contents of the report.*
2. *The Governance and Audit committee request that the Denbighshire Youth Justice Service board and partnership be discussed at the relevant scrutiny committee*

6 DRAFT GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2023-2024

The Chief Internal Auditor, Bob Chowdhury, presented the Annual Governance Statement 2023 – 2024 (previously circulated); the Council has a statutory duty to publish an AGS in compliance with the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014, as amended by the Accounts & Audit (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2018. The report allows the committee to comment on this year's annual governance statement separately from the Statement of accounts so that it may be given due consideration.

The statutory role of the Committee was to:

- Review and scrutinise the authority's financial affairs,
- Make reports and recommendations about the authority's financial affairs,

- Review and assess the risk management, internal control and corporate governance arrangements of the authority,
- Make reports and recommendations to the authority on the adequacy and effectiveness of those arrangements,
- Oversee the authority's internal and external audit arrangements,
- Review the financial statements prepared by the authority.

The committee discussed the following further –

- The chair highlighted that he was a co-author of the report. He also highlighted that the Governance and Audit (GAC) committee meeting was very well attended, and the observations raised by the members were commendable.
- The committee queried the good practice questions (page 102) and whether there had been a change from the previous year. Members were informed that following the training and the meetings they attended, their scores had raised to 180 out of 200.
- Lay member Nigel Rudd informed the chair and the chief internal officer that the report was well-rounded and well-structured and commended them both on it. However, he raised the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) (page 90) and queried what value it added to the report. The chief internal auditor informed the member that the information had to be reported annually and would be monitored every five years.
- Members outlined the recent issues in the council, such as waste disposal; members queried whether the committee could influence the matter more. The chair highlighted that the matter with the bins was discussed as an urgent matter. However, he deferred to the monitoring officer; he clarified that the committee was to look at the council's governance and how it could stop the matter from happening again by looking at the matter and the lessons that could be learned from them.
- Members suggested that a footnote on annex 3 of the report (page 100) show the numbers required to be quorate be included.

The monitoring officer informed the committee that following this meeting and the comments raised, the report would be discussed at a future full council meeting (November)

RESOLVED that the Committee approves the draft report and appendices.

At this juncture, the chair called for a comfort break (11:45 am–12pm)

7 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2023 - 2024

The Chief Internal Auditor, Bob Chowdhury, presented the Annual Governance Statement 2023 – 2024 (previously circulated). The report aimed to demonstrate good governance; the Council must show that it complies with the core principles set out in the Framework for Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (Wales) 2016 edition. The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) is prepared using a self-assessment and reports on the council's governance and improvement arrangements for 2023-24, along with progress in addressing the improvement

actions contained within the AGS 2022-23. The AGS is reported as part of the final Statement of Accounts.

The Annual Governance Statement 2023-24(Appendix 1) was developed by self-assessment of the Council's governance arrangements against the Framework for Delivering Good Governance in Local Governance (Wales)2016 edition. This was conducted with the support of key officers within the Council, who represent the key governance functions across the Council. The AGS referenced various evidence and assurance sources, such as the Internal Audit Annual Report, Annual Performance Report, External audit reports, and risk registers.

A summary of the cost-of-living crisis and the current budget pressures facing the Council have been considered, together with a review of the new ways of working for staff and members. The statement has also reviewed committee meetings and how they are now all online and webcast to ensure good governance arrangements.

The AGS highlights any areas for improvement to governance arrangements in an action plan. Progress against the previous year's improvement plan shows good progress, and any ongoing actions have been carried forward into the current year's improvement plan.

The committee discussed the following further –

- The committee highlighted the corporate risk register, how they would like to show the risk from most significant risk to lowest, and the process used to deal with those risks; the committee wanted to make the information more palatable for the public if they choose to engage with the information. The Chief Internal Auditor understood the concerns raised by the members; he stated that there used to be a Governance and Audit (GAC) board, which was good at getting statements written out more effectively and better structured. Still, with the staff workload, it was hard to input all GAC's concerns. Bringing back the board was something the chief internal officer had thought about for a while, and the Monitoring Officer (MO) agreed that bringing it back would be beneficial. Relating to the comments regarding the information being palatable, officers clarified that all documents needed to be accessible to all and, therefore, were more text-based. However, they would investigate the matter if a solution could be found.
- The committee queried whether the reduction in staff and the mounting workload had an impact on the audit team and the work they could carry out. The chief internal officer clarified that there was work stress; however, staff have been assisting with the bin issue, which he believed was good for them to get away from work and to assist.
- The MO added that, regarding the capacity issue, the council did not expect staff to do additional work. However, work would need to be prioritised appropriately.
- The committee suggested that all meeting webcasts be held for longer than six months. The MO would investigate the matter, as previously older webcasts had been uploaded onto YouTube.

- The committee suggested sending the AGS to the standards committee for them to comment on the matter. The MO would be happy to include the draft AGS for future standard committee meetings.
- Lay member Nigel Rudd queried the Cost-of-Living Crisis and its inclusion in the report. Officers clarified that it had been included due to its impact on residents.
- The table on page 131 of the report was highlighted. The committee wanted to ensure they could see any changes and improvements identified, as they could impact the GAC.
- The committee queried the auditing of Denbighshire Leisure Limited (DLL); they were informed that they would not be audited by the internal audit team, but an external would carry out the work. The committee was reassured that the audit could be reviewed by the internal audit team, and the members were also informed that if there were any concerns regarding DLL, any area could be audited at any time.

RESOLVED that the committee review and approve the draft annual governance statement for 2023-24 and the action plan for 2022-23, as well as committee endorse the creation of a Governance and Audit board.

8 TREASURY MANAGEMENT UPDATE AND REVIEW

The Head of Finance and Audit (HFA), Liz Thomas, introduced the Annual Treasury Management (TM) Report 2023/24 and the TM Update Report 2024/25 Quarter 1 (previously circulated); The Annual TM Report 2023/24 (Appendix was about the Council's investment and borrowing activity during 2023/24. It also provides details of the economic climate during that time and shows how the Council complied with its Prudential Indicators. The TM Update Report (Appendix 2) provides details of the Council's TM activities during 2024/25 to date.

The Annual TM Report 2023/24 (Appendix 1) was about the Council's investment and borrowing activity during 2023/24. It also provides details of the economic climate during that time and shows how the Council complied with its Prudential Indicators. The TM Update Report (Appendix 2) provides details of the Council's TM activities during 2024/25 to date.

On 27 October 2009, the Council agreed that the Governance and Audit Committee would scrutinise TM's governance. Part of this role was to receive an update on TM activities four times a year and review the enclosed Annual TM Report for 2023/24.

The committee discussed the following further –

- The committee queried the external borrowing and whether the amount was likely to reduce; the HFA clarified that the borrowing for 23/24 had increased mainly due to the coastal defence work being undertaken; the revenue costs of the project, however, would be covered in the main by increased funding by the Welsh Government. The borrowing would not likely reduce as there were other projects, such as the school building programme. However, this had not been reduced in scope, but the cost would be spread over a more

extended period. Responding to whether there were any concerns about the grants not being honoured, the HFA did not have any.

- The committee queried whether the recent change in Westminster could impact TM. Officers were not aware of any changes; however, if there were any substantive changes in the future, those details would be circulated.
- The committee requested the possibility of having a short report on financial stress testing revenue impact of the capital programme. The matter had been requested at a previous meeting. The HFA would look into the matter and circulate the information to the CAG members.

RESOLVED that

1. *The Governance and Audit committee note the performance of the TM function during 2023/24 and its compliance with the required Prudential Indicators as reported in the Annual TM Report 2023/24*
2. *That members note the TM update report for performance to date in 2024/25.*
3. *The Committee confirms that it has read, understood, and considered the Well-being Impact Assessment.*

9 UPDATE TO MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND PLAN FOR 2025/26 - 2027/28

The Head of Finance and Audit (HFA), Liz Thomas, introduced the Update to Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Plan for 2025/26 – 2027/28 report (previously circulated). The report provides an update to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Plan for 2025/26 – 2027/28.

Part of the role of the Governance and Audit Committee is to seek assurance that the Council has effective and robust processes in place for setting balanced budgets. The report updates the Committee on

- proposed budget strategy for setting the budget for 2025/26 as set out in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)
- financial projections for the three years 2025/26 to 2027/28 in the high-level Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

The HFA informed the members that the areas highlighted in yellow were the key areas of change within the report.

The committee discussed the following further –

- The committee queried T1 on the new financial system and whether there were any teething issues. The HFA stated there had been some issues, but it was to be expected to change from a system that had been in use since 1996; reserve revenue budgets covered the cost implications of the change. The process was taking longer than anticipated, but confidence was growing in the system.
- The cost implications of the new waste model were queried. Officers were working through the costs and will share with Members as soon as possible.

However, the HFA would circulate the information to both members and lay members once it was known to keep them informed on the matter as it progressed.

- Members queried whether officers had confidence in the saving tracker. Officers were confident of the system; however, to preface the matter, the tracker was only as good as the information that was inputted and updated.
- The potential salary increases to align with inflation was queried, as was whether the Council had the finances to accommodate the upcoming increases. The decision on the finances was ultimately down to the Welsh Government and the UK government.
- Lay member Nigel Rudd commended the report and queried whether the council had a reserve target. The HFA indicated that it was a significant challenge to increase reserves in the current financial climate, and the ideal target was for a 5% saving, but that may not be practically achievable.
- Council Workshops which discussed finance, it was queried whether lay members could be included, they could be included if the business was relevant to them.

RESOLVED that the Governance and Audit Committee have considered the Update to Medium Term Financial Strategy and Plan For 2025/26 - 2027/28.

10 LITTLE ACORNS AT CHRIST THE WORD

The Corporate Director of Social Services and Education, Nicola Stubbins, introduced the Care Inspectorate Wales Inspection (CIW) & Estyn Inspection Report—Little Acorns at Christ the Word (previously circulated). Alongside the corporate director to present the report were the Childcare and Play Development Manager, Dawn Anderson, and Childcare supervisor, Craig Taylor.

The report aimed to provide information regarding the recent CIW and Estyn Inspection at Little Acorns at Christ the Word. Little Acorns at Christ the Word is a Playgroup, Afterschool and Holiday Club providing full-day and sessional care based at Christ the Word Catholic School in Rhyl, opened in August 2019. This was the first joint CIW & Estyn inspection of Little Acorns. CIW and Estyn evaluate a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale – excellent, good, adequate, and poor. Four themes were judged as excellent and one as good; no areas of non-compliance were identified during this inspection, and the summary of these findings was included in the report.

The committee discussed the following further –

- The committee fully supported the positive inspection report and commended all involved for their hard work and dedication.
- The committee queried how much Welsh Language was encouraged around Rhyl; officers informed the committee that five fluent Welsh speakers were within the childcare team. There was a cylich in the little acorns. The inspection also praised the amount of Welsh language and culture encouraged by Christ the Word.
- The provision's capacity was raised, but it was not at capacity, and there was ample space for the new cohort in September.

- The committee wanted to ensure the good news article was circulated to highlight good work. The positive reports would be circulated to staff and to wider childcare providers throughout the county, and the information would be voiced through press releases.

RESOLVED that the Governance and Audit committee has read, understood, and considered the report's contents.

11 CARE INSPECTORATE WALES - INSPECTION REPORT ON DOLWEN, DENBIGH

The Corporate Director of Social Services and Education, Nicola Stubbins, introduced the Care Inspectorate Wales Inspection (CIW) Report—Dolwen Care Centre, Denbigh (previously circulated) alongside Katie Newe, Service Manager: Care and Support and Responsible Individual (RI), Ann Lloyd, Head of Adult Social Care and Homelessness, and Councillor Elen Heaton, Lead Member for Health and Social Care.

The report was to provide information regarding the recent CIW Inspection carried out in Dolwen Care Centre, Denbigh. Dolwen offers services with experienced staff within an adapted environment to meet the needs of the individual residents. Dolwen was purpose-built in 1966 and provides a 32-bed residential facility. 4.3. Placements include long-term care and short-term respite and reablement care. The last inspection was carried out on 28th February 2022. CIW carried out an unannounced inspection on 29th February 2024. The inspection took place on-site over one day, and there was a desktop review of policies, procedures, and key documents used in the service, such as care plans, risk assessments, staff training induction, and supervision records. Verbal feedback was given to the Registered Manager (RM) and the Responsible Individual (RI) on 8th April. During this meeting, the inspector advised that the service would have achieved a silent rating of good. No areas of improvement were identified because of the inspection. The summary of the findings could be found within the report.

The committee fully supported the positive inspection report and commended all involved for their hard work and dedication.

The committee again suggested that the report be circulated as a good news story for the item. Officers clarified that the press release would be circulated following the meeting. The committee queried what a silent rating was, and it was clarified that it was not shared, as was verbal feedback.

RESOLVED that the Governance and Audit committee has read, understood, and considered the report's contents.

12 FOR INFORMATION - CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The chair informed the committee the item was for information purposes; the substantial report would be brought back to the committee at the November meeting.

RESOLVED that the Governance and Audit Committee note the Corporate Risk Register information report.

13 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

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

Members were informed that a piece of work was being undertaken by Internal Audit, which included mapping all the items which had been presented to GAC since 2020, so now had the frequency of when reports were put forward to GAC. Hopefully, this piece of work would be completed and available for the September meeting to ensure a full and thorough forward work programme.

The statement of accounts was still planned for September. The Monitoring officer also stated that the Code of Governance and Audit was scheduled for September but could change depending on workload.

Training—dates to be provided. The Chief Internal Auditor will liaise with Democratic Services and get dates in the diary for training sessions.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the Governance and Audit Forward Work Programme be noted.