

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Audit and Governance Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House on 27 January 2025

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.37 pm and ended at 4.15 pm

42 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee held on 27 November 2024 were confirmed as a true record.

43 Declarations on interest

None given.

44 Public speaking

There were no members of the public wishing to speak.

45 Matters of urgency

None.

46 Confidential/exempt item(s)

None.

47 Risk project update

The Management Information Officer gave an update to the current work on the project to review and update the risk register and risk management processes. The project linked in with the project to implement a new performance and risks system Inphase, which would change the way risks were recorded and reported. The Directors and Assistant Directors had participated in workshops to scrutinise what each directorate did and to identify their risks as well as risks operationally.

The Chair asked that there be an update at the July's audit committee to how the new performance and risks system was doing and a high-level review of what it was intended for and any key risks.

RESOLVED:

1. That the update on the risk project be noted.
2. That the provided strategic risks update be noted.

48 Strata update on Backup & Business Continuity following DAP presentation - verbal

Robin Barlow, Security Manager for Strata spoke on concerns on cyber-attacks . Back-ups were the undertaken to provide a recovery of the data in the event of an attack. They allowed the council to function if a problem arose with the council's IT systems, as well

as having business continuity and IT recovery plans in place. IT systems were backed up at least nightly with multiple copies being saved on various data storage systems and retained over a time schedule.

The Security Manager also provided a comment on recent Distributed Denial of Service attacks seen against many UK councils' websites and the risk-based approach being adopted to mitigate against these by the Council. There was also a comment on the business continuity considerations when moving IT systems to the cloud, whilst having data also help locally in the Council data centre.

49 **Financial Monitoring report 2024/25 - Month 6 September**

The following report was presented to Cabinet on 27 November 2024. The report was now presented to Audit & Governance Committee to inform the Committee of the financial position for month 6 September 2024 and to note any recommendations to Council.

There was discussion to why the report was not up to date. It was highlighted that the report was received quarterly to Cabinet before coming to the following Audit and Governance Committee. The Finance Manager in response gave a verbal update to the Month 9 report being presented at the next Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

To note the Financial Monitoring month 6 (September) 2024 position and the recommendations to Cabinet on 27 November 2024.

50 **Verbal update on 2023/24 Accounts Audit - Director of Finance and Grant Thornton**

The Director of Finance and Peter Barber from Grant Thornton gave a verbal update to the progress of the 2023/24 Accounts Audit. Both were disappointed that they had not come to a point of being able to complete the audit of accounts. 2023/2024 was always going to be a challenge due to the previous two years having been backstopped hence further work being undertaken in 2023/24 increasing the workload. Grant Thornton agreed to a review session with the Finance Team to understand what changes needed to be made on both sides to be in a better position for the 2024/25 accounts audit. The Director of Finance stated the 2023/24 account was going to be a backstop opinion, he was disappointed that a qualified opinion would be at least another year. He stated that previous years had had interim audits which had merit to spreading out the workload for requests from Grant Thornton and going forward the Director of Finance would welcome this to be the case. Grant Thornton agreed to conveying the working papers requirements to the council to assist the audit approach in a timely manner.

Discussions included the following:

- Audit areas of higher risk need to be a priority
- Member appreciation and thanks to the Finance team and Grant Thornton for working together under these circumstances
- The need to work on an audit timetable in order the Committee to assist in the process
- The need to inform to Full Council of this situation

In answer to the question to what was the position of the council not having a completed audit, Peter Barber from Grant Thornton stated that accounts were fundamental to the

transparency and accountability of the council as an organisation. The importance for a clean opinion for decision-makers that the financial position was true and fair was crucial.

There was to be an extraordinary meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee on the 20th February 2025 to receive the summary report of the 2023/24 Accounts.

The Chair thanked Peter Barber for joining the meeting and providing a update to the position of the 2023/24 accounts audit.

51 **Discussion on SWAP Audit Plan 2025/26 - verbal**

The Chair stated that SWAP were in process of getting 2025/26 plan together and reminded the Committee that they had been asked to contribute to any further suggestions to be added to their forward plan.

52 **Audit and Governance Forward Plan**

Audit and Governance Committee Forward Plan items to be considered at the next committee included:

- Annual Audit Plan 2025/26 and Review of Internal Audit Charter
- Internal Audit Progress Report
- External Auditor's Annual Report
- External Audit Committee update
- External Audit Accounts 2024/25 update
- Partnership Review 2024
- Accounting Policies Approval

Attendance List

Councillors present:

I Barlow
K Bloxham
C Brown
C Burhop (Chair)
O Davey (Vice-Chair)
C Fitzgerald
M Goodman
Y Levine

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

S Hawkins

Officers in attendance:

Amanda Coombes, Democratic Services Officer
Jo Avery, Management Information Officer
Robin Barlow, Compliance and Security Manager - Strata
Simon Davey, Director of Finance
Tracy Hendren, Chief Executive
John Symes, Finance Manager
Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance (Monitoring Officer)
Peter Barber, Grant Thornton

Chair

Date: