

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Audit and Governance Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House on 14 December 2023

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.40 pm and ended at 4.14 pm

24 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee held on 21 September 2023 were confirmed as a true record

25 Declarations on interest

There were none.

26 Public speaking

There were no members of the public present.

27 Matters of urgency

None

28 Confidential/exempt item(s)

None

29 Internal Audit Plan Progress report 2023/24 - SWAP

Jenny Frowde from SWAP, presented the Internal Audit Plan Progress report 2023/24. The Director Finance gave an organisational progress update. During discussion a comment was made to how useful having a list provided of what actions to be taken were going to be.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made in delivery of the 2023/24 internal audit plan as at the start of November and the findings reported be noted.

30 Interim Auditor's Annual Report 2021/22 - Grant Thornton

Jackson Murray from Grant Thornton presented the Interim Auditor's Annual Report 2021/22. Discussions concerning Governance included the acknowledgement that during the period 2021 -2022 there was an issue of poor relationships between certain senior officers and Members. The Committee agreed that action had been taken and the situation had improved. Newly elected members spoke of positive and fair relationships with officers. This report covered a snapshot in time with current position reflecting positive actions taken.

Cllr Ian Barlow expressed concern to why had it taken so long to receive the report, which now felt out of date and less relevant. He was worried that if there was a hold up within the reporting process, then any expected reports would not be available on time which could lead to a serious risk to the council. In response Jackson Murray explained that the risk was reported to the March 2023 Audit and Governance committee. The work was undertaken at the beginning of the year, followed by a consultation period. Grant Thornton had to go then through their own risk management process and then consult with the council's management team then it was referred to the committee.

Cllr Mike Goodman said the report highlighted serious issues to the council which may have not been addressed since 2022. He pointed out that seven recommendations from the previous annual report centred around governance had not been addressed. He stated that what was happening then should have been reported at the time not now, having to wait 7 months for a report was not acceptable. He highlighted that a recommendation from last year's annual report asked for a peer review. He asked that if the council had started a Peer Review in 2022 would many of the issues identified in the report be actioned or started and had this decision put EDDC at risk?

The Vice-Chair agreed there was a lot of alarming insight however Grant Thornton were satisfied that management and members were satisfactorily addressing these issues. He could see action had been taken and as long as this was followed through this should improve the arrangements. It was the committee's responsibility for governance and to be satisfied that any issues were being followed up.

It was agreed that an additional action would be included to future audits on the 'About time?' report presented at the last committee. This was focused on exploring the reasons for delayed publication of audited local authority accounts.

The Chair asked that the Committee be presented with the auditor's recommendations and status, tracked from one year to the next.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Interim Auditor's Annual Report 2021/22 be noted and support was given to the actions contained in the management responses.
2. That concerns that the recommendations from the last report were not actioned and of adverse findings from the Housing Ombudsman in this report, be noted.

31 **Audit and Governance Forward Plan**

Items to be considered at the 18 January 2024 committee included:

- Internal Audit Activity – Quarter 3 2022/23
- Audit Committee update
- Strata Annual Internal Audit report
- Statement of Accounts

Attendance List

Councillors present:

C Brown
C Burhop (Vice-Chair)
C Fitzgerald
M Goodman
S Hawkins (Chair)

Y Levine
C Nicholas
T Olive

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

J Bailey
I Barlow
J Brown
P Hayward
S Jackson
J Loudoun
H Parr

Officers in attendance:

Amanda Coombes, Democratic Services Officer
Simon Davey, Director of Finance
Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance & Licensing (Monitoring Officer)
Jenny Frowde
Jackson Murray, Grant Thornton

Councillor apologies:

K Bloxham
S Gazzard

Chair

Date: