

NEWARK AND SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of **Audit and Governance Committee** held in the Civic Suite, Castle House, Great North Road, Newark, NG24 1BY on Wednesday, 19 February 2025 at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor R Holloway (Chair)
Councillor S Michael (Vice-Chair)

Councillor R Cozens, Councillor S Forde, Councillor A Freeman,
Councillor S Haynes, Councillor C Penny, Councillor M Shakeshaft and
Councillor T Thompson and Mr C Richardson (Non-Voting Co-Optee)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor N Allen

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor J Hall and Councillor P Harris

135 NOTIFICATION TO THOSE PRESENT THAT THE MEETING WILL BE RECORDED AND STREAMED ONLINE

Other than the Council recording in accordance with usual practice, there were no declarations of intention to record the meeting.

136 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

That no Member or Officer declared any interest pursuant to any statutory requirement in any matter discussed or voted upon at the meeting.

137 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 DECEMBER 2024

AGREED that the minutes from the meeting held on 11 December 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Chair informed the meeting that report items 16 and 17 would be taken first.

138 MEMBER SURVEY

The Committee considered the report from the Director of Customer Services & Organisational Development reporting back on the outcomes of the Member Survey.

The survey was completed by 20 members out of 39 which is just over a 50% completion rate. Of those completing the survey 9 of the members were new members joining the council in May 2023 and 11 were existing members.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) Members noted the report; and
- b) Members approved officers to undertake work to develop an action plan.

139 CUSTOMER FEEDBACK - HALF YEAR 1 - 2024/2025

The Committee considered the report from the Director of Customer Services & Organisational Development.

The Customer Feedback report is an opportunity for the Committee to see what complaints are being submitted across the organisation for half year 1. It gives an opportunity to understand how the customer is receiving the services we deliver and is a form of performance management to inform how well we are doing and where we can improve.

AGREED (unanimously) that the Audit & Governance Committee meeting noted the Customer Feedback Half 1 report and recommend PPIC conduct a performance review for any areas of concern.

140 INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT 2024/25

The Committee considered the report from Philip Lazenby, Director of Audit (TIAA) providing a summary of Internal Audit work undertaken during 2024/25 against the agreed audit plan.

The report reminded Members of the audits that are in the Internal Audit Plan for 2025/26.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) the Members considered and commented upon the internal audit progress report and noted its content; and
- b) the Members reviewed the Internal Audit Plan for 2025/26 and made comment where appropriate, providing provisional approval.

141 EXTERNAL AUDITORS ANNUAL AUDIT COMPLETION REPORT

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Financial Services presenting the External Auditor's Annual Audit Completion Report for Newark and Sherwood District Council for 2023/24.

The representative from Mazars, Mark Surridge presented the External Auditor's report.

The report confirmed that the External Auditor had issued an unqualified opinion of the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) Members received the External Auditors Annual Audit Completion Report for 2023/24;

- b) Members noted the adjustments to the financial statements set out in the report: and
- c) the letter of representation signed by the Director of Resources – S151 Officer and the Chair of the Committee, be approved.

142 EXTERNAL AUDITORS ANNUAL AUDIT REPORT

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Financial Services presenting the External Auditor's Final Annual Audit Completion Report for Newark and Sherwood District Council for 2023/24.

The representative from Mazars, Mark Surridge, presented the report at Appendix A.

The Annual Audit Report confirmed that the External Auditor anticipates issuing an unqualified opinion of the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts. Approval of the Statement of Accounts by this Committee is being taken elsewhere on the agenda.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) Members received and noted the External Auditors Final Annual Audit Report for 2023/24; and
- b) Members noted the adjustments to the audited financial statements set out in the report.

143 APPROVAL OF THE STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Financial Services providing the Council's Statutory Accounts for the financial year ended 31 March 2024.

The report informed Members that this would be the final version of the Statement of Accounts, having brought the draft to the Audit & Governance Committee on 31 July 2024.

It was noted to update the final documents with the new Chair's details.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) Members approved the Annual Governance Statement for the financial year ended 31 March 2024 ;
- b) Members approved the Audited Statement of Accounts for the financial year ended 31 March 2024; and
- c) Members noted that as per the previous report the S151 Officer and the Chair have signed the Letter of Representation.

144 BUDGET REPORTS 2025/26

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Financial Services providing Members with reports which have been approved at Cabinet on 18 February 2025:

General Fund Revenue Budget 2025/26

General Fund Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 – 2028/29

Capital Programme 2025/26 – 2028/29

AGREED (unanimously) that Members received and noted the reports that were presented to Cabinet on 18 February 2025.

145 CAPITAL STRATEGY 2025/26

The Committee considered the report from the Assistant Business - Manager for Financial Services seeking Committee approval to the Capital Strategy 2025/26, this incorporates the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and Capital Prudential Indicators, updated in accordance with latest guidance.

AGREED (unanimously) that: the Committee approved each of the following key elements and recommends these to Full Council on 6 March 2025 while noting that as the budgets are still being finalised some of the figures within the Strategy may alter:

- The Capital Strategy 2025/26 Appendix A.
- The Capital Prudential Indicators and Limits for 2025/26, contained within Appendix A.
- The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Statement as contained within Appendix C, which sets out the Council's policy on MRP.
- The Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy, contained with Appendix D.

146 INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2025/26

The Committee considered the report from the Assistant Business Manager - Financial Services providing the Investment strategy for 2025/26, meeting the requirements of statutory guidance issued by the Minister of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Investment Guidance in January 2018.

AGREED (unanimously) that the Committee approved each of the following key elements and recommended these to Full Council on 6 March 2025 while noting that as the budgets are still being finalised some of the figures within the Strategy may alter:

- The Investment Strategy 2025/26 Appendix A.
- The Investment Prudential Indicators and Limits for 2025/26, contained within Appendix A.

147 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2025/26

The Committee considered the report from the Assistant Business Manager - Financial Services seeking approval for the Treasury Management Strategy, which incorporates the Borrowing Strategy, Investment Strategy and Treasury Prudential Indicators, updated in accordance with latest guidance.

AGREED (unanimously) that the Committee approved each of the following key elements and recommended these to Full Council on 6 March 2025 while noting that as the budgets are still being finalised some of the figures within the Strategy may alter:

- The Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26, incorporating the Borrowing Strategy and the Annual Investment Strategy (Appendix A).
- The Treasury Prudential Indicators and Limits, contained within Appendix A.
- The Authorised Limit Treasury Prudential Indicator contained within Appendix A.

148 REVIEW OF SIGNIFICANT ISSUES IN THE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Financial Services providing an update to Members of the Audit & Governance Committee on the significant governance issues identified in the Annual Governance Statement.

At the meeting of the Audit & Governance Committee on 31 July 2024, Members approved the draft Annual Governance Statement for the Council for financial year ended 31 March 2024; part of the Council's Statement of Accounts. The Annual Governance Statement has not been amended since that point and is attached to the Audited Statement of Accounts report on this Committee's agenda for final approval. To ensure that Members can undertake their assurance role, this report updates the Committee on the status of the governance issues identified within the Annual Governance Statement.

AGREED (unanimously) that Committee noted the results of the review of significant governance issues as identified in the Annual Governance Statement.

149 WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee considered the report from the Assistant Director - Legal & Democratic Services, Monitoring Officer providing an annual report to update the Committee on the implementation of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy.

The Monitoring Officer informing Members that no whistleblowing concerns had been recorded in the past year.

AGREED (unanimously) that Members noted the report, that the Committee includes an annual review of the operation of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy in the Committee's Work Plan and that an awareness raising exercise be undertaken during the next year.

150 GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee considered the report from the Assistant Director Legal & Democratic Services, Monitoring Officer providing an annual report to update the Committee on the implementation of the Council's Gifts and Hospitality policies.

The report highlighted that there would be a reissuing of the guidance.

AGREED (unanimously) that Members noted the report and that the Committee includes an annual review of the operation of the Council's Gifts and Hospitality arrangements in the Committee's Work Plan and that an awareness raising exercise be undertaken during the next year.

151 REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000 (RIPA) - ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee considered the report from the Principal Legal Officer and RIPA Co-ordinator, reporting to the Committee:

- i. Activity by the Council under RIPA from 2023 to December 2024
- ii. IPCO Inspection
- iii. Relevant minor amendments to the RIPA Policy
- iv. An update on mandatory training for officers

The internal policy, including the names of relevant Authorising officers, the Senior Responsible Officer and RIPA Co-ordinator is on the intranet and provides much more detailed information on how surveillance techniques may or may not be used and will be available on the internet and intranet. Minor amendments have been made to the policy to reflect changes in names/job titles of relevant officers and some improvements to level of detail and layout.

AGREED (unanimously) that Members noted the report and agreed the minor amendments.

152 CODE OF CONDUCT - UPDATE AND GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION

The Committee received the report from the Assistant Director Legal & Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer to consider an update on Code of Conduct complaints and the Government Consultation on Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England.

This consultation seeks views on introducing a mandatory minimum code of conduct for local authorities in England, and measures to strengthen the standards and conduct regime in England to ensure consistency of approach amongst councils investigating serious breaches of their member codes of conduct, including the introduction of the power of suspension. The consultation document including proposed response is attached as the Appendix to this report.

The report asked the committee to consider the draft response and Members may also wish to send their own individual responses.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) the report be noted; and
- b) the Committee approve a Council response to the Government consultation as set out in the Appendix to the report subject to changing the answer to question 12 to 'unsure'.

153 MEETING DAY OF THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the report from the Assistant Director Legal & Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer to consider the best day for Committee meetings going forward.

AGREED that the meeting day of the Audit & Governance Committee revert back to a Wednesday and the dates for the meeting schedule in 2025/26 be subject to agreement with the Leader of the Council.

154 AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The Committee considered the joint report of the Assistant Director Legal & Democratic Services, Monitoring Officer and the Business Manager for Financial Services which attached the Committee's Work Plan for consideration.

AGREED (unanimously) that the Work Plan be noted.

155 DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 19 MARCH 2025

Meeting closed at 7.30 pm.

Chair