

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, 7 May 2025 at 6.00 pm.

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

Councillor R Cozens, Councillor S Forde and Councillor S Haynes

ALSO IN Councillor N Allen and Councillor P Rainbow
ATTENDANCE:

APOLOGIES FOR Councillor P Farmer, Councillor A Freeman, Councillor J Hall, Councillor
ABSENCE: P Harris, Councillor C Penny, Councillor M Shakeshaft and Councillor
T Thompson and Mr C Richardson (Non-Voting Co-Optee)

169 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.

170 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.

171 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 APRIL 2025

AGREED that the minutes from the meeting held on 16 April 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

172 REVIEW OF CONTRACT PROCEDURE RULES

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Financial Services to review the Council's Contract Procedure Rules, approve the revisions where appropriate and recommend to Council for adoption.

The Contract Procedure Rules were last reviewed in May 2022 when the Council adopted the Cabinet system of Governance, the report advised they were due for a review and refresh.

The Contract Procedure Rules have been reviewed in conjunction with Welland Procurement with suggested changes from the updates to the Procurement Act 2023, together with their knowledge of Contract Procedure Rules from other authorities.

AGREED (unanimously) that Members considered and commented upon the revised Contract Procedure Rules and recommended to Council for approval.

173 REVIEW OF FINANCIAL PROCEDURE RULES

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Financial Services to review the Council's Financial Procedure Rules, approve the revisions where appropriate and recommend to Council for adoption.

The Financial Procedure Rules were last reviewed in May 2022 when the Council adopted the Cabinet system of Governance, they are therefore due for a review and a refresh.

The Financial Procedure Rules have been reviewed in conjunction with the S151 Officer to update where appropriate and clarify any relevant sections, with no material changes to the Financial Procedure Rules as a result of this review.

AGREED (unanimously) that Members considered and commented upon the revised Financial Procedure Rules and recommend to Council for approval.

174 OUTCOME OF HOUSING OMBUDSMAN INVESTIGATION (REF: 202324726)

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Housing Services to inform Members of the outcome of an investigation where the Ombudsman found fault with the Council.

A resident had complained to the Housing Ombudsman regarding various issues relating to the Council's handling of:

- Noise nuisance, anti-social behaviour and inappropriate staff conduct
- Complaints

The Housing Ombudsman determined there to be maladministration in one area and service failure in two areas:

- Maladministration in respect of the landlord's response to the resident's reports of ASB
- Service failure in respect of the landlord's complaint handling

The report advised that Corporate ASB training has been added to the 2025/2026 programme and will include the lessons learnt from this determination. Training will take place following the implementation of the new housing management system in May 2025.

The report highlighted that findings of maladministration are published regularly on the Housing Ombudsman Service website along with spotlight reports which focus on specific issues or service areas to raise awareness and help landlords improve.

AGREED (unanimously) that Members noted the report, and the lessons learnt.

175 OUTCOME OF HOUSING OMBUDSMAN INVESTIGATION (REF: 202333701)

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Housing Services to inform Members of the outcome of an investigation where the

Ombudsman found fault with the Council.

A resident had complained to the Housing Ombudsman regarding various issues relating to the Council's handling of:

- Noise nuisance, anti-social behaviour and inappropriate staff conduct
- Services covered by the service charge not being provided
- Complaints

The Housing Ombudsman determined there to be maladministration in one area and service failure in two areas:

- There was maladministration in relation to the landlord's handling of the resident's reports about noise nuisance, ASB and inappropriate staff conduct
- There was service failure in relation to the landlord's handling of the resident's report about services covered by the service charge not being provided
- There was service failure in relation to the landlord's complaint handling

Corporate ASB training has been added to the 2025/2026 programme and will include the lessons learnt from this determination. Training will take place following the implementation of the new housing management system in May 2025.

The report highlighted that findings of maladministration are published regularly on the Housing Ombudsman Service website along with spotlight reports which focus on specific issues or service areas to raise awareness and help landlords improve.

AGREED (unanimously) that Members noted the report, and the lessons learnt.

176 LOCAL GOVERNMENT PEER REVIEW - CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

The Committee considered the report from the Assistant Director Legal & Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer informing the meeting of the recommendations from the Local Government Association Peer Challenge that have been delegated to Audit & Governance Committee.

At its meeting of 18 February 2025, Cabinet considered the findings of the Local Government Association Peer Challenge and agreed the formation of a working group tasked with an action plan to address those findings. The Chair and Vice Chair of Audit & Governance Committee were appointed to the group. At its first meeting on 25 February, the group agreed for Audit & Governance Committee to action the following recommendations:

- 1.1.1 Review the audit, governance, and overview and scrutiny functions of the Council to maximise councillor engagement and council productivity
- 1.1.2 Strengthen and enhance the Annual Governance Statement
- 1.1.3 Strengthen the application of the national Code of Conduct
- 1.1.4 Establish a Councillor development group
- 1.1.5 Ensure councillors understand the longer-term budget pressures
- 1.1.6 Establish an ongoing councillor development programme

A progress report is due to be submitted to the working group in May, with a view to progress on the entire action plan being reviewed with the Local Government Association around September 2025.

AGREED (unanimously) that Committee:

- (a) notes progress on the recommendations from the Local Government Association Peer Challenge that have been delegated to Audit & Governance Committee; and
- (b) updates the Committee's Work Plan accordingly.

177 REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION

The Committee considered the report from the Assistant Director Legal & Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer with proposals for amendments to the Council's Constitution following consideration by an informal Audit & Governance Committee working party.

Amendments and updates endorsed by this Committee will be recommended to Full Council for approval at the Annual Meeting in May and the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel will be asked to undertake a review in respect of any changes in Committee Terms of Reference.

The Committee noted training on procedure rules for Members in June, and an addition to Appendix I was circulated at the meeting with additional wording for the Acquisitions and Disposals Policy:

- 2.5.3 Where it is decided to negotiate a disposal to a single party (identified by paragraph 2.5.2) rather than offer it on the open market then this needs to be referred to in any decision. When negotiations take place with the interested party in order to reach an agreed sale price and the provisions of paragraph 2.7.1 still apply.

AGREED (unanimously) that Audit & Governance Committee:

- (a) recommends the Constitutional amendments set out in Appendices A, B, E, G, I and J to Full Council for approval;
- (b) endorses the adoption of templates for motions and amendments as illustrated in Appendices C and D subject to approval by Full Council of the relevant amendments to Full Council Procedure Rules;
- (c) recommends a reduction in membership of Audit & Governance Committee to 9 members to Full Council for approval;
- (d) endorses amendments to arrangements for Audit & Governance as set out in paragraph 2.9 of the report;

- (e) request that Officers explore options for more regular meetings with the auditors to assist with Audit & Governance Committee Member development;
- (f) recommends that Policy & Performance Improvement Committee re-issues guidance to all Members as set out in paragraph 2.11 of the report;
- (g) updates its work programme to include feedback at least annually on meetings between the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee, and the Chair and Vice Chair of Policy & Performance Improvement Committee;
- (h) recommends the addition of 'Principal Legal Officer' to the list of Officers with authority to seal legal documents on behalf of the Council, to Full Council for approval; and
- (i) approves the review of the sections of the Constitution set out in paragraph 2.26 of the report, with any proposals for amendment being brought to this Committee as soon as practicable.

178 CONDUCT AND PUBLIC SERVICE

The Committee considered the report from the Assistant Director Legal & Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer on progress on implementation of the Full Council resolution 'Conduct and Public Service' made on 15 October 2024.

Members discussed the possibility of the Council hosting a conference to promote good conduct in public service with the aim of encouraging people to enter public life. There were mixed views about the merits of hosting a conference, and some concerns were raised about the potential cost, and whether a conference properly falls within the Council's remit.

The report proposed to convene a further workshop to focus on review and update of the Councillor Social Media Protocol. Officers to also explore the cost and resource implications of raising awareness of the Local Government Association's 'Debate not Hate' campaign.

AGREED by 4 Members 'For' and 1 'Against' that Committee:

- (a) notes that proposals for Member training in respect of standards of conduct will be taken forward in the Member Training Protocol workstream;
- (b) agrees to give further consideration to amendments to the Code of Conduct for Councillors at a future date;
- (c) agrees to convene one further workshop on the Conduct and Public Office topic focussing on social media;
- (d) notes that Officers will explore the cost and resource implications of supporting the Local Government Association's Debate not Hate Campaign; and

(e) notes that further enquiries will be made regarding the possibility of hosting a conference regarding good conduct in public office.

179 AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

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

The Chair noted 8 reports currently in the Work Plan including the additional Conduct and Public Service in Social Media and Local Code of Corporate Governance.

The Committee were concerned with the recent cyber incidents affecting large named companies such as Marks & Spencer, the Committee requested that Dave Richardson, Business Manager for ICT & Digital Services attends the next Audit & Governance Committee to provide an update to the LGA Newark and Sherwood District Council Cyber 360 Progress Report. Councillor Haynes would also email Dave Richardson with relevant questions before the next meeting in preparation of the Committee.

Councillor Michael asked if a date had been set for this year's Treasury Management Training, however the relevant officers to ask were not present, the date to be provided following this meeting.

AGREED (unanimously) that the Work Plan be noted.

180 DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 2 JULY 2025

Meeting closed at 7.04 pm.

Chair