

## Minutes of Accounts & Audit Committee

Meeting Date: Wednesday, 13 February 2019 starting at 6.30pm  
Present: Councillor R Bennett (Chairman)

Councillors:

J Alcock	B Hilton
I Brown	A Knox
M Fenton	R Newmark
L Graves	R Sherras

In attendance: Chief Executive, Head of Financial Services, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Mark Heap and Sophia Iqbal (Grant Thornton)

Also in attendance: Councillors S Bibby, K Hind, S Hind and Barry Dearing (Independent Person).

A request had been made for Simon Farnsworth, Solicitor, to sit as Solicitor acting in the Chamber. Mr Farnsworth confirmed to Committee that he was on record for the Subject Member. The Chairman asked for Committee's permission, and this was approved.

### 649 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors P Dowson and R Thompson.

### 650 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 31 October 2018 and 12 November 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 651 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY AND NON-PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interest.

### 652 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

### 653 SUB-COMMITTEE ARRANGEMENTS

The Chief Executive advised on declarations of interest.

Councillors J Alcock and B Hilton declared an interest and left the meeting.

The Chief Executive submitted a report seeking confirmation of the membership of the Hearing Sub-Committee, following changes to the membership of the Accounts and Audit Committee. Councillors S Hirst was no longer a Member of Accounts and Audit Committee, and therefore it was necessary to replace him as a Member of the Sub-Committee.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services reminded Members of the resolution of Council on 11 December 2018, that the selection of the Member of the Sub-Committee who was not a Member of the Conservative Group was to be made by agreement between the three Members of the Committee who were not Members of that group, so as to ensure that the panel reflected the requirement for political balance.

There was discussion on issues including the selection of the Member of the Sub-Committee who was not a Member of the Conservative Group, the Nolan principles, the process of investigation to prepare the report, and the procedural challenges which had delayed the full hearing of the complaint.

Councillor K Hind was given permission to speak on this item and the Committee also received intervention from the Independent Person.

RESOLVED: That Committee confirm the appointment of Councillor R Bennett as a Member of the Hearing Sub-Committee.

Councillors S Bibby, K Hind and S Hind left the meeting, together with Simon Farnsworth.

Councillor J Alcock re-joined the meeting.

#### 654 CLOSURE OF ACCOUNTS TIMETABLE 2018/2019

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing Committee that the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 now require the Responsible Financial Officer to sign the Statement of Accounts as a true and fair view and publish them by 31 May 2019, and for the Council to publish the audited accounts by no later than 31 July 2019. Last year, the Council was able to close down the accounts under the regulations and met the new deadlines as required. The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 had set out details of requirements in relation to duties and rights, and also brought in changes to the key deadlines for approval of the Statement of Accounts and completion of the audit.

The principal matters covered in the Accounts and Audit Regulations were highlighted by the Head of Financial Services for Committee's information. The regulations also stipulated various responsibilities for closure of accounts relating to Members and the Responsible Financial Officer.

Reference was also made to budget implications and practical issues, and the importance of attending the scheduled meeting for the approval of the audited statement of accounts at the proposed meeting on Wednesday, 24 July 2019. He outlined a timetable that must be strictly adhered to in order to achieve the deadlines required.

Reference was also made to the current staffing requirements in the financial department and Members were informed how the work would be carried out in the event that the posts had not been filled by the time of closure of the accounts.

RESOLVED: That Committee endorse the suggested approach for the closure of the 2018/2019 accounts.

655 INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL PLAN 2019/2020

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing Committee of the Internal Audit Plan for 2019/2020. This included the various audit areas and planned number of working days for each of the areas. A brief explanation was given as to how the Audit Plan is arrived at, following consultation with Directors, Heads of Service and the external auditors. The risk based methodology was also explained to Members, together with an explanation that the plan was based on anticipated recruitment and restoration of full staffing levels.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the 2019/2020 Internal Audit Plan as outlined.

656 GRANTS CERTIFICATION REPORT 2017/2018

Sophia Iqbal presented a report on the certification of claims and returns. Grant Thornton had certified the housing benefit subsidy claim for the financial year 2017/2018 relating to subsidy claimed of £6.77million. There were no issues arising from the certification work. The report outlined fees totalling £11,191 that would be the fee for this work being carried out.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

657 GRANT THORNTON EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2018/2019

Mark Heap submitted a report for Committee's information, highlighting Grant Thornton's overview of the planned scope and timing of the audit. The document was also an aid to understanding the consequence of their work, discussing issues of risk and the concept of materiality and identified any areas where the Council may choose to request to undertake additional procedures. The contents of the plan had been discussed with management. He highlighted the partnership approach to which the Council and Grant Thornton were committed to meet the demanding deadlines.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

658 INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT 2018/2019

The Director of Resources submitted a report for Committee's information on the internal audit progress to date for 2018/2019. The report highlighted the audit work and reports issued since the last report to Committee, including the aim to review all of the Council's fundamental systems before the end of the financial year. All the audits carried out since the last meeting in October 2018 had reached either full or substantial assurance levels.

Members were updated on staffing issues within the audit team and the impact which this has had on progress, including prioritisation of work.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

659 20<sup>TH</sup> REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE

The Chief Executive submitted a report for Committee's information on the production of a report entitled 'Local Government Ethical Standards' on

30 January 2019 by the Committee on Standards in Public Life. A link was provided to the full report, and Members' attention was drawn to the introduction by the Chair, Lord Evans of Weardale, together with the executive summary and list of recommendations.

Members were reminded that the Council's own systems were to be reviewed after conclusion of the current complaint, and that the recommendations would provide useful guidance in this process.

Members reflected on the apparent reconsideration of the trends under the Localism Act 2011, the position of Parish Councils, and the revised approach to release of the home addresses of candidates at the time of elections, or of Members in their declarations of interest.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.20pm.

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact Marshal Scott (425111).