

Agenda item 7

AGS/20/21	
Report title: Audit Committee Effectiveness Review – Annual Progress Update	
Report to: Audit, Governance and Standards Committee	
Report author: Paul Turner, Director, Legal and Assurance	
Date: 27 September 2021	For: Approval
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County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report asks the Committee to review and agree the Audit Governance and Standards (AGS) Committee Training and Development Plan produced following the Skills and Knowledge Assessment which took place in July 2021.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Approve the Training and Development plan attached at Appendix 1

3. Background

- 3.1 In March 2020 the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) were commissioned to support the AGS Committee to undertake a review of its effectiveness. This is in line with recommended best practice.
- 3.2 As part of this process the Committee agreed to undertake a Skills and Knowledge Assessment that would inform a Training and Development Plan.
- 3.3 The Committee agreed that the Skills and Knowledge Assessment would be delayed until after the May election to capture the training and development needs of any new Committee members. As a result, the assessment took place in July 2021.

4. Summary of Issue

- 4.1 It is recognised best practice that Audit Committees should regularly review their effectiveness as a committee and their individual skills and knowledge. The CIPFA publication 'Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police (2018 Edition)' provides a range of tools and checklists for committees to use to assess their effectiveness.

4.2 The approach to the skills and knowledge assessment was based on the CIPFA guidance. The process followed was:

- Questionnaires were prepared based on the skills and knowledge requirements set out in Appendix C of the CIPFA guidance.
- Committee members completed these questionnaires, assessing their own level of skill and knowledge in the specified subject areas based on a 1-5 rating,
- Committee members were also asked if they hold any relevant qualifications and to specify any particular training requirements.
- 100% of Committee members responded.
- The questionnaires were analysed to identify issues where the Committee members felt they had the greatest need for development
- A draft plan was produced
- All members of the committee were invited to attend an online discussion to consider the results of the survey and were invited to comment on the draft plan.

4.3 The product of this assessment is the plan at appendix 1 which the committee are asked to adopt. Clearly significant time and expense is involved in developing these activities and all members of the committee are asked to participate as much as possible. To facilitate attendance most of the sessions will be delivered online.

4.4 A further report will be brought back to the committee in 2022 to consider whether the programme has achieved its aims.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 It is likely that some costs will be incurred where external trainers are required but officers believe that this can be met within existing resources.

6. Legal Implications

6.1 The Audit Committee is a key way in which the Council provides assurance that it is providing value for money and has proper systems of control. Without effective assurance Councillors will not know that the Council is effectively carrying out its statutory duties. Whilst the skills assessment is not a legal requirement it seems a good idea in order to maximise the investment made by councillors into the work of the Committee.

7. Equality and Diversity Implications

7.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 creates the public sector equality duty which requires that when ECC makes decisions it must have regard to the need to:

- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act
- (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

7.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation. Equality and diversity matters have been considered in the production of this report.

8. List of Appendices

Draft Training and development plan 2021/22.

9. List of Background Papers

- CIPFA Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police (2018 Edition)