
Minutes of the meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee, held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Chelmsford on Monday, 28 June 2021

Present:

Members:

Councillor S Barker	(substitute for Councillor L Barber)
Councillor A Hedley	Chairman
Councillor M Hoy	
Councillor D King	
Councillor A McGurran	
Councillor A McQuiggan	
Councillor M Platt	
Councillor L Shaw	
Councillor C Siddall	
Mr Atta Ul Haque	Independent member appointed to the committee

ECC Officers:

Joanna Boaler	Head of Democracy and Transparency
Paula Clowes	Head of Assurance
Christine Golding	Chief Accountant
Andy Gribben	Senior Democratic Services Officer (clerk to the meeting)
Justin Long	Senior Democratic Services Officer
Stephanie Mitchener	Director of Finance
Paul Turner	Director, Legal and Assurance (Monitoring Officer)

1. Welcome and Introduction

Councillor Hedley, the Chairman of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee, welcomed those in attendance. He noted that those members who were new to the Council may be in the Council Chamber for the first time but that as the meeting was taking place under the rules of social distancing, if anyone moved from their seat, they should wear a face covering.

2. Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The report of Membership, Apologies and Declarations was received, and it was noted that:

1. The membership of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee was as shown in the report.
2. Apologies had been received from Councillor Barber and Councillor Barker was in attendance as his substitute. Councillor Mackenzie had also sent his apologies.

3. Declarations of interests were made by Councillors Hedley and Platt as they were members of the Essex Pensions Board.

The Chairman, Councillor Hedley reminded members that any interests must be declared during the meeting if the need to do so arose.

3. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

It having been moved by Councillor Barker and seconded by Councillor Hedley, and there being no other nominations it was

Resolved:

That Councillor Platt be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the 2021/22 municipal year.

4. Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 22 March 2021 were approved as a correct record.

5. Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2021

The committee received a report (AGS/12/21 and appendix) from Paula Clowes, Head of Assurance. The report, meeting the requirements of the UK Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, expressed the annual internal audit opinion (to be used by the council to subsequently inform the Annual Governance Statement) and measured the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the council's internal control environment (the framework of governance, risk management and control). The report also informed the committee of the Internal Audit and Counter Fraud activity for 2020/21.

Members were advised that in the opinion of the Internal Audit Service, the internal control environment for 2020/21 was one of 'Satisfactory Assurance', that meant that although there were some weaknesses that may put individual system/process/service objectives at risk of achievement, there was an overall satisfactory system of internal control, appropriately designed to meet the Council's objectives, and controls were generally being applied consistently.

Resolved:

That the Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Annual Report and the opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's internal control environment be noted.

6. Draft Statement of Accounts 2020/2021 and the Draft Annual Governance Statement

The committee received a report (AGS/13/21) from Nicole Wood, Executive Director, Finance and Technology presented by Christine Golding, Chief Accountant and Paul Turner, Director, Legal and Assurance.

The report presented to the committee for information a draft of the Statement of Accounts and the draft Annual Governance Statement for 2020/21 and explained the committee's role regarding approval and publication of the documents in September 2021.

The committee noted that the Executive Director for Finance and Technology would certify the draft (unaudited) Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 on 30 June; and present the draft accounts to the external auditor and commence the 30- day period for the exercise of public rights on 1 July.

Members were informed that the external auditor is planning to report the results of their audit work to the Committee on 27 September 2021, at which stage the Committee would be asked to consider the external auditor's findings before approving the Statement of Accounts for publication.

The committee also received the draft Annual Governance Statement, which would be published with the Statement of Accounts and the members of the committee were invited to comment, request changes or note any significant developments. They also noted that, subject to any amendments then made, they would be asked to approve the final Annual Governance Statement on 27 September 2021.

Resolved:

1. The Committee noted the arrangements for approval and publication of the Council's Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 and
2. The Committee noted the draft Annual Governance Statement for 2020/21.

7. Review of Members Gifts and Hospitality Register April 2020 – May 2021

The committee received the annual review of the Member Gifts and Hospitality register (AGS/14/21 and appendix) from Paul Turner, Director, Legal and Assurance.

It was suggested by a member of the committee that, in future, it would be helpful to be informed as to the reason for any gift or hospitality received. In response, members were informed that this might be possible, but only the information provided by the member may be included.

Resolved:

The report was noted.

8. Annual report on the work of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee

The committee received the receive Annual Report of the Audit Governance and Standards Committee (AGS/15/21 and appendix) from Paul Turner, Director, Legal and Assurance.

Members were advised that the Audit Governance and Standards Committee was required to present the report to Full Council outlining the committee's purpose and role as well as the activities that it has undertaken throughout the preceding financial year to support good governance and strong public financial management.

The report would provide Full Council with:

- Committee Membership
- Terms of Reference and Purpose of the Committee
- Details of the Committee's work during the financial year ending 31 March 2021.
- An update on the Effectiveness Review Action Plan

Resolved:

That Annual Report of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee was approved to be reported to the meeting of Full Council in July 2021.

9. Work Programme

The committee received report AGS/16/21 presented by the Director, Legal and Assurance which detailed the planned ongoing programme of work.

Members were reminded that the work programme was subject to regular revisions and change.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

10. Date of the Next Meeting

The committee noted that the next scheduled meeting would be held on Monday 27 September 2021 at 10.30am at County Hall, Chelmsford and would be preceded by a private meeting for members of the Committee only

Chairman