

SWT Audit and Governance Committee - 13 September 2021

Present: Councillor Lee Baker (Chair)
Councillors Ed Firmin, Simon Coles, Dawn Johnson, Janet Lloyd,
Martin Peters and Terry Venner

Officers: James Barrah, Ian Candlish, John Dyson, Paul Harding, Alison North,
Clare Rendell, Richard Sealy, Amy Tregellas, David Warren and Alastair
Woodland

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

23. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Steven Pugsley and Sarah Wakefield.

24. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee held on 26 July 2021.

(Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee held on 27 July 2021 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee held on 27 July 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

25. Declarations of Interest

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor or Clerk of a County, Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr L Baker	All Items	Cheddon Fitzpaine & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Booth	All Items	Wellington and Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr N Cavill	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Peters	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr T Venner	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke

26. **Public Participation**

No members of the public had requested to speak on any item on the agenda.

27. **Audit and Governance Committee Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Audit and Governance Committee Forward Plan, circulated with the agenda).

Councillors were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance Team.

Resolved that the Audit and Governance Committee Forward Plan be noted.

28. **Corporate Equalities Action Plan Update**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors were pleased to see that there was a member briefing set up to discuss Black Lives Matter, as the same training provider had delivered a very informative session for the Working Group.
- Councillors thanked the officers and councillors that had been involved in the work on the action plan.
- Councillors agreed that it was an important piece of work which had a lot of legal implications for the Council.
- Councillors had enjoyed being part of the Working Group and believed the composition was well represented.
- Councillors stated that as we moved towards a new Unitary Authority, they wanted to ensure that the objectives were carried forward into the New Council.
- Concern was raised that the objectives needed to be updated before the New Council was formed.

The Strategy Specialist advised that it was always healthy to review the objectives and that work would be taken to the Working Group to carry out. The objectives were flexible and could be amended, he wanted to ensure that they benefited the whole community.

- Concern was raised on how accessible the democratic process was for those in protected character groups.
- Councillors queried whether any progress had been made on finding a permanent site for gypsies and travellers.
The Strategy Specialist advised that work was still in progress across the county on finding a site.
- Councillors highlighted the training that had been offered to officers and wondered if all councillors would be offered the same training.

The Strategy Specialist advised that training would be offered to councillors, but they were aware there were already a lot of sessions being offered to councillors at present.

- Councillors requested that the mental health training offered to officers should be rolled out as soon as possible.
- The Strategy Specialist agreed.

Resolved that the Audit and Governance Committee reviewed the Action Plan and noted the progress made to date.

29. **Landlord Health and Safety Property Compliance Update Report**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors requested clarification on whether the 18 extra electricians being brought in to assist with workload, were existing officers that would be retrained or were they new employees.
The Assistant Director for Housing Property advised they were new employees.
- Councillors queried who would monitor the quality and quantity of the work carried out.
The Assistant Director for Housing Property advised that there was a manager, supervisor and other officers who worked together as part of a risk audit and monitored the quantity and quality of the work carried out.
- Councillors queried whether the 18 extra electricians were being employed on a short-term contract.
The Assistant Director for Housing Property advised that they were being employed through a contractor so not directly with the Council.
- Councillors queried when the meeting halls would reopen.
The Assistant Director for Housing Property advised that there was a rolling programme to reopen all the meeting halls as they require a deep clean along with PAT testing and water testing at each premises.
- Councillors requested reassurance that the remedial actions listed under water testing were not related to anything that would cause concern.
The Assistant Director for Housing Property gave councillors reassurance.

Resolved that the contents of the report and progress being made in relation to landlord property safety compliance be noted.

30. **Internal Audit Plan Progress Update 2021-22 Q1**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors were pleased to see that action had been taken to rectify the previous issues raised relating to the Deane DLO.
- Concern was raised on the limited assurance that had been given to the Health and Safety section, which mentioned lack of knowledge at member level.
The Director of SWAP advised that a Health and Safety update should be presented to the Audit and Governance Committee, which would improve knowledge at member level.

- Concern was raised on the number of advisories in the report.
The Director of SWAP gave clarification on the advisories that had been given.

Resolved that the Audit and Governance Committee noted progress made in delivery of the 2021-22 internal audit plan and significant findings since the previous update in June 2021.

31. **SWAP Internal Audit - Baseline Assessment of Maturity in relation to Fraud**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors welcomed the push to ensure that the risk of fraud was reduced.
- Councillors queried how success was measured.
The Internal Auditor advised that measuring success was difficult, however a structure had been implemented to monitor the activity and a robust policy had been put in place to ensure the number of fraud cases were lowered.
- Councillors queried when the next progress update report would be presented to the Committee.
The Internal Auditor and Monitoring Officer advised that the next report would be brought to the Committee in 3-6 months' time.
- Councillors queried whether there were any whistleblowing investigations currently underway.
The Monitoring Officer advised that there were a couple being investigated.
- Councillors queried how Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) compared to other councils in the audit.
The Internal Auditor advised that a baseline exercise had been completed and SWT had proved to be 'mature', however, there was still a little more work that needed to be carried out which could reduce the risk of fraud.
- Concern was raised on the amber indicator next to the committee related risk and queried whether this was because councillors were not asking the correct type of questions at committee meetings.
The Internal Auditor advised that lack of training on fraud risk was the main reason, along with lack of reporting the fraud activity to committee. He further advised that it was the committee role to oversee the process and not that the committee had committed fraud.
- Councillors requested to have some examples of cases added to the next report so they could understand what types of fraud were being detected.
The Internal Auditor would include the information in a confidential appendix.

Resolved that the Audit and Governance Committee noted further information provided on the Baseline Assessment of Maturity in relation to Fraud.

32. **Summary of Level 1 and 2 Internal Audit Actions**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Concern was raised on the Procurement Strategy and that it was still marked as 'in progress'. Councillors were aware of a lot of procurement activity and wanted assurance that the process was secure.
The Corporate Finance Manager advised that there had been resourcing issues, which they were trying to rectify and were in the recruitment stages.
- Councillors queried when the corporate training would take place on DLO invoicing and Street Scene procedures.
The Assistant Director for Customer would report back on this once the processes had been put in pace.
- The Director of SWAP reassured councillors that since the report had been written, a lot of actions had been completed and that he was happy with the outcomes.

Resolved that the Audit and Governance Committee reviewed the overdue actions contained in the report and noted progress to date.

(The Meeting ended at 7.50 pm)

