

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

(Multi-Location meeting Council Chamber Port Talbot/Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

21 March 2024

Chairperson: J.Jenkins

Councillors: A.J.Richards, P.D.Richards, P.Rogers,
S.Grimshaw and W.Carpenter

Officers In Attendance: N. Daniel, H.Jones, A.O'Donnell, C.Furlow-Harris, D.Mulligan, L.McAndrew, S.McCluskie and J.Woodman-Ralph

Representing Audit Wales: A.Lewis and J.Brown

1. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENT/S**

The Chairperson welcomed all to the meeting and updated Members on the recent risk management training which was facilitated by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). Officers explained that feedback had been received on the content of the training which will be fed back to the WLGA. Officers were currently reviewing the training to address the needs of the committee going forward.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

That the following Members made a declaration of interest at the commencement of the meeting.

Councillor W.Carpenter

Agenda Item 8, Internal Audit Quarterly Update Report as he is a school governor at Melin Primary School but has dispensation to vote and speak.

Councillor P.Rogers

Agenda Item 8, Internal Audit Quarterly Update Report as he has been involved in discussion with Pale Road, Supported Living on a Personal matter.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 26th of January 2024, were approved as a true and accurate account.

4. **AUDIT WALES - STRATEGIC WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT - NPTCBC ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSE**

Members received the Council's response to the Audit Wales – Springing Forward: Strategic Workforce Management – Neath Port Talbot Council as detailed in the circulated report.

Wales Audit Office representatives attended the meeting and explained that the report was a very positive report and the Council had a clear vision for its Workforce.

Discussion took place on the recommendations contained within the circulated report that needed further focus on to continue to build on the good practice already in place.

- Progression and pathways for Staff;
- Resilience around business critical roles and identification;
- Succession planning;
- Better understanding of the impact of the Workforce Strategy;
- Consider and build on the benchmarking of measures and metrics and identify key areas of good practice and potential areas for improvement.

Following on, Members queried what work was taking place to increase the number of succession plans, the quality of those plans and how managers were going to be encouraged to use the improved toolkit.

Officers explained that a number of workshops had taken place with all managers, informing managers of the importance of succession planning and the use of the toolkit. These workshops had now formed part of the core training for new managers and will take place annually with all managers.

In addition, a Talent Management Team had been created which had started to look at the future skills sets required and by working with colleges and universities how these needs could be planned for. The team are also looking at the current workforce and developing career pathways within the Council.

Members were very pleased and reassured by what they had received today and thanked all the team for all the work they had undertaken to progress this and looked forward to hearing more on the progress in future.

Members noted that the continued monitoring of this would be an important part of the Governance and Audit Committees role.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

5. **AUDIT WALES - WORK PROGRAMME AND TIMETABLE - QUARTER 2 UPDATE**

Members received the Audit Wales – Programme & Timetable – Quarterly Update to 31st December 2023 as detailed in the circulated report.

It was noted an error on the agenda which stated Quarter 2 and should have read Quarter 3.

Audit Wales representatives attended the meeting and updated Members on the planned delivery timescales contained within the report. It was highlighted that after meeting with Officers it had been agreed that the Financial Sustainability Review would now take place between April and July and the Commissioning Arrangements review would follow on in the Autumn. This was because the Financial Sustainability Review takes place across all Councils in Wales and it informs the Welsh Government on the sustainability of councils across Wales and to feed into budget planning.

Audit Wales explained that the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2025 timetable and status links into when each authority updates their wellbeing objectives and it is a statutory function of Audit Wales which has to be undertaken on a 5 yearly basis. Officers confirmed that this has been completed and considered by Members.

In addition, information was received on Review of Unscheduled Care Report. Audit Wales explained that the report had been delayed but has now been completed and will be reported to the Health Board and the Directors of Social Services as it's a joint piece of work. On receipt of the responses a report will be submitted for consideration at a future date of Governance and Audit Committee.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

6. **AUDIT WALES - REGISTER OF REGULATORS REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members received an overview of the Register of Regulators Reports and Recommendations as detailed in the circulated report.

Officers explained that the Neath Port Talbot Council – Use of Performance Information: Service User Perspective and Outcomes (November 2023) will be considered at the next meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee.

In addition, the report will be considered at Cabinet on the 17th April and not as stated in the report 17th March 2024.

Discussion took place on the current format of the data. Officers confirmed that they have taken on board the comments of the Governance and Audit Committee and will be bringing forward alternative ways for displaying the data in future.

Members were disappointed at the negative wording contained within one of the national reports, Sustainable Development – making the best use of brownfield land and empty buildings. The report stated that “NPT did not wish to take part” in the above fieldwork. When actually the reason given was that NPT was not in a position at the current time due to the exceptional workload, Celtic Freeports, Wildfox Development, Global Centre for Rail Excellence, a number of Levelling Up Bids and the drawing down of the Shared Prosperity Fund being undertaken by Officers. It was agreed that in future a more detailed explanation would be stated in Audit Wales reports.

Members queried how the recommendations in these reports are monitored to ensure they are implemented/actioned. Officers explained they were looking at developing a process for monitoring

the implementation of recommendations to ensure they are tracked and understood by all Officers and that there is a mechanism in place to share the learning from all regulators reports and recommendations.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

7. **DRAFT INTERNAL AUDIT STRATEGY AND INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN FOR 2024/25**

The Committee received details of the draft Internal Audit Strategy and Risk Based Plan for the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025 and the Internal Charter as detailed in the circulated report.

Members asked that officers when agreeing ways of disseminating information to all Members, they must consider and include lay members in the process for sharing information.

Following on, it was asked whether the Audit Team were going to be able to achieve the number of audits detailed in the plan with the current level of staff. Officer explained that the vacant trainee post within the audit team had now been filled. In addition, a number of contingency days had been added into the plan so Officers were confident they could meet the timescale in the plan.

RESOLVED: That the draft Internal Audit Strategy, the Internal Audit Plan 2024/25 and the Updated Internal Audit Charter as detailed in Appendices 1,2 and 3 be approved.

8. **INTERNAL AUDIT QUARTERLY UPDATE REPORT**

The Committee received an overview of the Internal Audit Quarterly Update Report since the last meeting in January 2024 as detailed in the circulated report.

Officers explained that six reports had been issued with one post audit review had been undertaken. This number was due to staff sickness and a vacancy within the team. Recently, a member of the team on long term sick had returned to work and the vacancy had been filled.

Members were disappointed with the lack of detail in the response received in regard to the Internal Audit Report No 50 – Mandatory Training Engineering Service and asked that in future more detail be included in all responses to the Governance and Audit Committee.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

9. **URGENT ITEMS**

No Urgent Items were received.

10. **ACCESS TO MEETINGS**

RESOLVED: that pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 12, 13 and 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

11. **SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UPDATE REPORT (EXEMPT UNDER PARAGRAPH 14)**

Officers provided an update on all special investigation reports issued since the last meeting and included details of all current special investigations.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CHAIRPERSON