

AUDIT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 DECEMBER 2024

Present:

Councillors Morgan (Chair), Radford (Vice-Chair), Jackman, Purser, Thorne and Steemson

Members in Attendance:

Councillors Parrott

Apologies:

Councillors Jeffries

Absent

Councillor Ryan

Officers in Attendance:

Martin Flitcroft, Director of Corporate Services

Sue Heath, Audit Manager

Christopher Morgan, Trainee Democratic Services Officer

Paul Nicholls, Food Health & Safety Manager

44. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was proposed by Councillor Jackman and seconded by Councillor Purser that the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed as a correct record and signed by the chair.

5 were in favour and 1 abstained.

Resolved

That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

45. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

None.

46. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (IF ANY)

The response to the public question was published before the meeting.

47. MEMBERS QUESTIONS (IF ANY)

None.

48. HEALTH AND SAFETY - FOLLOW UP

The Environmental Health - Food, Health and Safety Manager updated the Committee on the work being done to address the recommendations raised by the internal audit and improve Health and Safety in the Council. The update included the following:

- Procurement of an online Health and Safety management system to improve the current implementation of the council's health and safety policy and arrangements.
- Procurement of a lone worker monitoring system which includes work being undertaken by the BTT team to identify lone workers,
- Top-down health and safety training and the planned introduction of a standardised health and safety training matrix for managers/team leaders and nominated staff.
- Ongoing de-escalation training for identified lone workers.
- How employees' access to the Employee Protection Register (EPR) and the ongoing reviews into the EPR.
- Ongoing work to ensure completion of risk assessments and display screen equipment assessments.
- The role of the Health and Safety Committee

Members raised concern related to an incident at another council depot when a fire swept through their vehicle fleet and requested assurance that the Waste depot was not tightly parking its vehicles together.

Members also raised concerns that Officers risk not having access to the Employee Protection Register when making home visits. The FHS Manager confirmed the EPR only covered the members of the public known to be higher risk, this is a minority group and doesn't cover all people or situations. The Committee were advised that there would always be risk when interacting with people. He assured members that de-escalation training and dynamic risk assessment were the best approach when dealing with the public. Staff are advised to leave if they feel they are in danger. Services with lone workers have access to the EPR and use it to update their own databases to inform officers.

It was an attack on a member of staff at Forde House that had resulted in a red rating on the SPAR risk.

It was noted there is no security in Forde House Reception and the public and members who visit the Forde House campus would be covered by the councils CCTV and arrangements for dealing with situations as they happen. Further training would be offered to staff regarding dealing with difficult or dangerous people.

49. GRANT THORNTON - AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT & SECTOR UPDATE

The Chief Financial Officer introduced the item.

The Committee raised their concerns around the completion of the External Audit.

In response, the CFO informed the committee on the massive workload that the External Audit had put of officers with extra hours, and this was during time of staff shortages. There had been disagreements over issues such as SANGS. The Audit Backstop from previous years could not be reopened, and it was noted that the backstop from previous years had affected the work of the current audit. A report would come to the next committee regarding the value for money, as well as another update on the external audit.

The Committee noted the update.

50. STRATEGIC & CORPORATE RISK REPORT

The Audit Manager introduced the report to the Committee.

The Committee noted that the report highlighted issues with members breaching the Code of Conduct and reaching house-building targets.

It was proposed by Cllr Morgan and seconded by Cllr Jackman that the report be noted.

All were in favour.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

51. COUNCIL TAX BASE 2025-26

The Chief Financial Officer introduced the report to the Committee.

Audit Scrutiny Committee had been granted the ability to approve the Council Tax Base. The CFO explained how the Council Tax Base had been calculated and that this included second homes.

The CFO was challenged on the Council Tax Base figures.

In response to comments from Councillors, he clarified that extra Council Tax is saved for use when necessary in the future, and that ongoing issues with under delivery of housebuilding would affect the amount of Council Tax received. There had been 0.65 percent growth since last year, and a lower collection rate

was expected for this year. It was noted that Covid hadn't affected house-building figures.

It was proposed by Cllr Purser and seconded by Cllr Morgan that the Committee approve the Council Tax Base as set out in the report.

A vote was taken and the result was unanimously in favour.

Resolved

That the Committee approve the Council Tax Base as set out in the report.

52. GOVERNANCE ACTION PLAN MONITORING REPORT

The Committee were informed that two reports would be due to go to Full Council regarding the Teignbridge Strategy and the Officer/Member protocol.

Democratic Services would update the Members' Information Hub regarding the new changes to the Heads of Services.

It was proposed by Cllr Morgan and seconded by Cllr Radford that the report be noted.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

53. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Audit Manager introduced the item to the Committee.

She advised that the Audit progress was satisfactory Devon Assurance Partnership audits were underway. Work was being undertaken to enforce Penalty Charge Notices. The Council had hired bailiffs to enforce these but due to issues with integrating them with the car parking system this had taken extra time.

The end date of the internal Audit was March 2025 which was earlier than previous years. The Housing audit had been delayed due to having to spend time on a new electronic system. The Democratic Services Audit had been paused due to resourcing issues. The Waste Audit was about to begin. There would also be a light touch risk management audit as this area had been recently assessed.

It was noted by members that there were a large number of ongoing or soon to start audits. Members asked to see the full details of the Devon Assurance Partnership's audits.

The Committee discussed how audit findings are laid out and rated such as the use of 'poor' as an assurance rating. It was noted that other assurance rankings exist. The chair asked that a column be added to explain who is carrying out the audit and provided some more background information.

The Audit Manager said she would look at the Better Governance Forum to see what upcoming training was available on reviewing accounts.

It was proposed by Cllr Morgan and seconded by Cllr Jackman that the report be noted.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and finished at 12.38 pm.

Chair
Cllr Sally Morgan