

Report of the Governance Committee

1. Any recommendations on the reports that require a decision by full Council appear as separate items on the agenda.
2. Please note that the report may not necessarily reflect the wording used in the minutes.

Meeting held on 26 September 2023

External Audit Progress Report September 2023 and Discussion on the PSAA (Public Sector Audit Appointments) Proposed 2023/24 Scale Fees

3. Georgia Jones, External Auditor (Grant Thornton) presented the External Auditor progress report year ending March 2023. The report stated that Grant Thornton expected to give their Opinion on the Statement of Accounts and the Auditor's Annual Report by the end of November 2023. Ms Jones also confirmed that Grant Thornton will follow up on the 2022/23 recommendations and report back in November 2023.
4. The Committee noted the External Auditor progress report year ending March 2023.
5. Arising from this discussion, Louise Mattinson, Director of Finance informed members that the PSAA (Public Sector Audit Appointments) were holding a consultation on proposals to increase the fee for External Audit services for the 2023/24 accounts.
6. Details of the proposed fees for South Ribble Borough Council had been circulated. Any feedback from the Committee would be submitted by the close of consultation on 10 October 2023.
7. It was stressed that PSAA had set the fee, which was a reflection of the increase nationally. The context for the increase was increased work for the external auditor in areas such as pensions and the auditing of accounting standards, and also market forces.
8. Louise Mattinson confirmed that the figure was a fixed fee and any additional work identified would attract a further increase.
9. The Committee expressed concern regarding the proposed 150% increase in fees, particularly at this point in time given that the Council would not know the outcome of the Local Government Settlement until December.

10. The Committee resolved the following:
 1. That the information be noted and
 2. That the comments of the Committee be submitted by close of the consultation on 10 October 2023.

Internal Audit Plan October 23 to March 24

11. Jacqui Murray, Senior Internal Auditor presented a report setting out the programme of work to be undertaken by Internal Audit from October 2023 to March 2024.
12. An enquiry was made regarding staffing levels in the Internal Audit team. The Committee were informed that there was one vacancy to which they were currently recruiting.
13. The Committee agreed that the Internal Audit Plan October 2023 to March 2024 be approved.

Internal Audit Progress report

14. The Head of Audit and Risk, Dawn Highton presented a report informing members of the work undertaken in respect of the Internal Audit Plan from April 2023 to August 2023 and giving an appraisal of the Internal Audit Service's performance to date.
15. The report included the final audit report following a Review of the Building Control Service and a Review of Data Quality, which had been given an 'adequate' assurance rating.
16. The report also included the final audit report on a Review of Sundry Debtors – Aged Debts which had been given a 'limited' assurance rating. Alison Wilding, Head of Customer Services was in attendance at the Committee to discuss the report.
17. Alison Wilding explained that a changeover of staff had led to relevant Heads of Service not being emailed. She assured the Committee that this had been rectified over the last few weeks.

18. Dawn Highton clarified that the potential risk of a “customer” receiving service while debts are still outstanding refers generically to members of the public or external agencies.
19. Alison Wilding confirmed that there was a log kept ensuring business continuity if a member of staff was off sick.
20. A query was made regarding the Council’s creditors. Dawn Highton indicated that a review of this was carried out in 2019/20, then repeated in 2021/22 and that all the actions had been implemented. The six-month Internal Audit Plan had now been approved, however it was likely that another review would be included in the Internal Audit Plan next year.
21. The Committee resolved the following:
 1. That the Internal Audit Progress report be noted; and
 2. That consideration of the Review of Building Control and Review of Data Quality report be deferred to the next meeting of the

Governance Committee Effectiveness Review

22. Dawn Highton, Head of Audit and Risk presented a report following a review of the Governance Committee’s effectiveness. The report included an evaluation of the Council’s compliance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) guidance “Audit Committees – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police 2022” and presented details of the self-assessment of good practice contained within the guidance.
23. The Head of Audit and Risk informed the Committee that, further to the review, an external training day had been arranged for Governance Committee members of both South Ribble and Chorley Councils on Monday, 30 October 2023.
23. The report highlighted that the appointment of two independent persons to support work of the Committee was recommended by CIPFA. Members of the Committee were supportive of the proposal. It was explained that the two independent persons could not be the same as those appointed to the Standards Committee, as they were different roles. However, it would be possible to approach other local authorities because it was possible to be an independent person at more than one Council.
24. The Committee resolved the following:

1. That the report be noted; and
2. That the Committee seeks to appoint two independent persons to support its work.

Constitution - Planning

25. The Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer presented a report outlining the work of the Governance Committee Constitution Task Group which had recommended possible changes to the Constitution relating to the Planning Committee
26. The Committee resolved the following:
 1. To agree the proposed changes to the Constitution concerning Planning Committee set out in the report in paragraph 14; and
 2. To recommend to Council that these changes be adopted.

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:

That Council notes the report of the Governance Committee.

Councillor Colin Sharples
Chair of the Governance Committee