

AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 28 JULY 2025 - 4.00 PM



PRESENT: Councillor K French (Chairman), Councillor I Benney (Vice-Chairman), Councillor G Booth, Councillor G Christy and Councillor Mrs J French

APOLOGIES: Councillor J Mockett

Officers in attendance: Sam Anthony (Head of HR and OD), Peter Catchpole (Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer) and Deborah Moss (Head of Internal Audit)

ARMC1/25 TO APPOINT A CHAIRMAN FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs French, seconded by Councillor Booth and agreed that Councillor Kim French be appointed as Chairman of the Audit and Risk Management Committee for the municipal year 2025/26.

ARMC2/25 TO APPOINT A VICE CHAIRMAN FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

It was proposed by Councillor Miss French, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and agreed that Councillor Benney be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Audit and Risk Management Committee for the municipal year 2025/26.

ARMC3/25 PREVIOUS MINUTES.

The minutes of the meeting held 12 May 2025 were approved and signed as a correct record.

ARMC4/25 MANDATORY TRAINING – VERBAL UPDATE

Sam Anthony, Head of Human Resources, provided a verbal update on mandatory training.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Mrs French stated that this appears to be a large amount of work which needs to be undertaken by officers, and she questioned whether there are enough staff to complete the training as well as carry out their day-to-day work. Sam Anthony explained that the courses are all E-learning courses and are scheduled so that they can be completed within the officers working week which is why staff have been allocated a time frame of a year in order to complete them all so that it does not impact on their day job and they can still undertake their role and deliver the services that they need to.
- Councillor Booth stated that there appears to be a number of courses for completion and he questioned as to whether consideration has been given to scheduling different modules over different months and providing a deadline in order to manage the training going forwards? Sam Anthony stated that the current completion rate is 50% which is encouraging but if the compliance rate were to drop then that could be something that could be considered. She added that with regards to health and safety courses there is a quarterly focus on certain topics which is promoted to all staff.
- Councillor Christy asked what arrangements are in place for those members of staff who are not office based to undertake the training? Sam Anthony explained that all members of

staff have access to the app so that they can access it on their mobile phones, however, in her view, it is reasonable for the training to be provided in house and in particular for refuse and recycling teams there are micro training sessions being carried out face to face in order that those staff who only require an awareness of a particular subject receive that training in their team meetings.

- Councillor Mrs French asked how many staff are still working from home? Sam Anthony explained that there is approximately 50% occupancy in most of the Councils' buildings on a day-to-day basis and there is still a significant amount of the workforce who are working from home or in an agile way.
- Councillor Booth asked whether the training modules are tailored to different levels as he feels that the Armed Forces Covenant would be more tailored to the senior management so that they can ensure it is being delivered as opposed to the refuse collection operatives where that subject would have very little impact on their day to day role because they are unlikely to be undertaking any recruitment or setting policies. Sam Anthony stated that the courses are mandatory for the type of role that people undertake.
- Councillor Tierney expressed the view that it does seem an extreme amount of mandatory training courses for officers to complete but if different areas of the Council have different elements of training which they need to undertake that is far better. He expressed the view that there does appear to be a high level of extra work for staff to undertake and he asked whether there is any way of ascertaining whether the staff feel as though they are gaining any value by completing all the training or whether they feel as though they are being forced to undertake pointless training? Sam Anthony stated that an evaluation process will be undertaken which will be completed after the first year to ascertain what the value is. She added that some of the mandatory courses are on subject matters which have not been covered robustly in the past. Sam Anthony made the point for subject matters, such as the Bribery Act and the responsibility of individuals with regards to that act, it does mean that officers are given the opportunity to elevate their knowledge. She added that with Local Government Reform coming forwards within the near future, the training is going some way to upskilling the workforce in readiness for that.
- Councillor Kim French asked whether any of the training is being rolled out to the elected members? Sam Anthony stated that the training is available to members and if the committee choose to make a recommendation it is something that can be considered.
- Peter Catchpole expressed the view that he welcomes the discussion which has taken place and added that as it has only been rolled out this year it has already stimulated some debate. He added that when a written report is provided it may entail some further detail. Peter Catchpole referred to the point made by Councillor Tierney with regards to it appearing that there is a significant amount of training for officers to undertake, however, a lot of the courses are only seven or eight-minute bite size modules however dependent on the member of staff's role there could be more in-depth training needed. He added that some of the courses are just to provide an overview to gain an awareness and because they are small bite size modules, it does not mean that officers have to put aside a large amount of their working day to complete the training which, in his view, is important.

Members noted the verbal update for information.

ARMC5/25 RISK REGISTER – QUARTERLY UPDATE

Members considered the Corporate Risk Register quarterly update presented by Sam Anthony, Head of Human Resources.

Members asked questions, made comments and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Booth referred to the three additional controls which Sam Anthony had referred to and asked whether they were going to be moved into the mitigation column as they will now become effective controls going forward, questioning whether as a result that will affect the scores? Sam Anthony explained that the mitigation column will be completed, and the

evaluation will be undertaken at the next review to see if it has had an impact before the scores are amended.

- Councillor Booth referred to the point by Sam Anthony with regard to declarations of interest and he asked whether that was for officers or elected members? Sam Anthony explained that she manages the declarations of interest for officers and the process will now be subject to an annual review. She added that where anybody declares an outside interest such as a School Governor, it is recorded on their personal file and will be subject to annual review. Sam Anthony added that Member Services manage the declaration of interest process for members. Councillor Booth expressed the view that he would like to see the distinction made in the mitigation element of the risk register so that it is made clearer, as most people would be under the impression that in Local Government, declaration of interest relates to councillors. Sam Anthony stated that this is a valid point which she will feed back.

Members AGREED the latest version of the Corporate Risk Register.

ARMC6/25 LOCAL CODE OF GOVERNANCE

Members considered the Local Code of Governance report presented by Deborah Moss, Head of Internal Audit.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Mrs French stated that with regards to the Constitution, following a recent Planning Committee, there were a number of confidential items listed on the agenda and as a result she has suggested to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and to the Head of Planning that there needs to be a change in the constitution so that items such as Section 215 and Section 216 matters do not need to be determined by the Planning Committee.
- Councillor Booth referred to page 46 where it refers to actions and controls and makes reference to quality policy and then further down in the document it mentions quality diversity and inclusion policy. He asked whether there are two policies which cover the same area or are they the same? Councillor Booth stated that he would suggest that because it is being viewed from a legal perspective then it should just be the Equality Policy as it reflects the Equality Act 2010. He expressed the view the other wording has a negative connotation and what is trying to be achieved is the legal obligation through that policy. Deborah Moss stated that she did find it difficult to ascertain whether there was an equality policy in place, however, one was drafted in 2025 with the title being the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy which is why it has been included with that title, and she explained that it is not just an equality policy. Councillor Booth expressed the view that he does not think it is the correct title to be used in the current climate.

Members AGREED to endorse the new Local Code of Governance.

ARMC7/25 DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2024/25

Members considered the Draft Annual Governance Statement report presented by Peter Catchpole, Section 151 Officer.

Members asked questions, made comments and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Booth made reference to page 76 of the report which relates to areas of further improvement to the Council's governance, with item 3 referring to the local decisions record to be introduced to capture all officer decisions to enhance transparency and record keeping and questioned whether there is a level as to what the decisions should be because there is the potential to be inundated with reams of paperwork every time an officer makes any type of decision and he feels that it should be quantified. Peter Catchpole stated that he feels that is a very valid point and he clarified whether Councillor Booth is referring to monetary

value decisions. Councillor Booth explained that he does mean monetary or if it has a strategic policy impact. Peter Catchpole stated that he will look to incorporate some further definition, and asked Councillor Booth if he can provide any further guidance on what that should be. He explained that his view was that it should be in line with the Constitution of Officer Decisions and the value there. Councillor Booth stated that he feels that would be a very good starting point and added that when considering the call in process it should probably be at the same type of level.

- Councillor Christy referred to point 8 where it mentions enforced use of purchase orders to enhance financial management commitments for accounting and he asked whether there was an associated deadline or timeframe for that to happen? Peter Catchpole explained that he would like to see this happen within the current financial year and added that the Council is having to move its financial system Agresso to the cloud. He stated that as part of the implementation which begins in October there is the need to get officers used to the fact that items will not be processed unless they have a purchase order. Peter Catchpole added that there are exceptions to that and things such as utility bills where there cannot be purchase order for. He added that the new system is being rolled out currently in order that when the implementation date arrives the officers will be more used to it.

Members AGREED that the content of the Draft Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25 to be included in the Council's published Statement of Accounts 2024/25.

ARMC8/25 INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT AND OPINION 2024/25

Members considered the Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion presented by Deborah Moss, Internal Audit Manager.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Booth stated that the report mainly relates to last year and the opinion has been provided with regards to the effectiveness of the audit function. He added that at a previous meeting the subject of resourcing was discussed, and he asked for an update on that issue and what impact that is going to have looking forward. Deborah Moss explained that she can give the committee a partial update although there is still no definitive conclusion at the present time. She explained that an officer from the Transformation Team has moved across to Internal Audit on a part time basis although the position is a full-time post. She added that as a result there is still the residue of that resource and consideration is being given to that issue and is being discussed by the Management Team as to whether it is going to be advertised as a 0.4 or higher.
- Peter Catchpole explained that resourcing is under constant review and the committee are all aware that over the last few years there have been expensive interim officers filling posts within the team which has proved costly, and it is not something that the Council wishes to continue with. He added that the Council have been fortunate to recruit Deborah Moss as the Head of Internal Audit and currently she is the only full-time employee within the Audit Team. Peter Catchpole added that the intention is to try and get more and more risk based on the audits and also considering Local Government Reorganisation which is also on the horizon as well so different options are being explored, and consideration is being given to a possible shared resource or a specialist resource coming in to do certain things. He explained that there has been a focus on cyber security over the past few months and the 0.4 post is still under review as some of that budget could be used to bring in one or two specialists to undertake audits on what is high risk. Peter Catchpole expressed the opinion that the committee should be provided with an up-to-date status later in the year with an up-to-date audit plan to match the resource. He added that the key point for him is the ability to be able to deliver the audit opinion and the resourcing is still under review but as long as the audit plan is robust that enables at the end of the year to deliver an opinion then the objective has been achieved.
- Councillor Booth stated that at page 95 it makes reference to the Asset Management Plan

and the fact that the Management Team have decided that it is no longer required. He asked Deborah Moss to clarify how much resistance is received from recommendations made in audit reports and whilst he appreciates that no Audit Team will be perfect and nor will they have a perfect understanding of everything, in his view, it is healthy to actually have challenge on some of the recommendations. Councillor Booth stated that he believes it is the first time he has ever seen that in a report where an action has been cancelled. Deborah Moss explained that she has used the word cancelled due to the fact that it had been accepted originally rather than rejected at the reporting stage. She added that with the onset of Local Government Reorganization, it appears that elements are being reconsidered which is perfectly acceptable. Deborah Moss added that there are a number of actions which have been postponed due to the proposed reorganisation and that could be down to the time aspect or just because people are considering the importance of tasks including whether there is a better way of doing things or whether there is a more joined up way of working. She stated that she would hope that there is not a significant impact on the agreed actions and that they will still be pursued and moved forward.

- Councillor Booth stated that he would like to know how much push back is received on audit actions from management and is there much discussion. He added that normally a draft report will be produced and then feedback is received but he questioned whether there is appropriate push back or whether the actions are just accepted without any sort of challenge. Deborah Moss explained that the discussion and agreement takes place at the closing meeting and at that time there is a discussion of findings and then agreeing any required actions which is why the terminology has changed from recommendations to agreed actions and if they are not agreed then they are not included within the report. She added that if there was an element which Internal Audit wanted to be implemented and if it was not agreed by management then it would be reported to the committee if it was deemed necessary and dependent on the risk and the control. Councillor Booth made the point that it is important to have that healthy discussion and debate because on many occasions an audit recommendation is received, and it is just accepted even if it is felt that it is not the right recommendation.
- Peter Catchpole stated that Deborah Moss is given plenty of scope to raise issues and he meets regularly with her. He added that a Corporate Governance Group has been set up which includes Deborah Moss and Amy Brown, along with himself so that any issues where it is felt that there is a clash or a disagreement can be discussed. Peter Catchpole added that any concerns are also raised at Management Team in front of the Chief Executive and any areas of real dispute or disagreement would come to the committee. He stated that Asset Management Plans can be in place for 30 years and it does not mean that the Council does not have actions in place to manage its assets but a 30 year asset plan would normally look at improvements or enhancements and at the current time the scenario is to consider what is in place at the moment rather than looking at anything larger.

Members AGREED

- **the outturn for Internal Audit for 2024-25, which highlights the audits that were completed and their associated assurance ratings and also the additional assurances gained from other sources of work completed in-house and externally to support the Annual Audit Opinion; and**
- **the Head of Internal Audit's opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk and internal control processes.**

ARMC9/25 AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

Members considered the Audit and Risk Management Committee Annual Report 2024/25 presented by Councillor Kim French, Chairman of the Committee.

Members AGREED the Audit and Risk Management Committee Annual Report for 2024-2025 to be forwarded to Full Council in September.

ARMC10/25 AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Audit and Risk Management Committee Workplan.

Peter Catchpole advised the committee that, at the current time, the items for the next meeting in September means that there will not be a lengthy agenda.

Councillor Mrs French questioned why there have been two meetings scheduled to take place a month apart in February and March 2025. Peter Catchpole explained that it is likely that one of those meetings will be cancelled but will be dependent on timings of audit results.

Councillor Booth suggested that the meeting on the 29 September could be cancelled as there would appear to be only a substantive item to bring forward. Deborah Moss explained that the Audit Plan does need full approval, and it can be circulated to members. Councillor Booth stated that would be a good idea, but he added that it is a work in progress anyway. Deborah Moss added that the updated version will only be a diluted version of the plan which came to the committee previously.

Members AGREED to note the workplan and for the meeting of the 29 September to be cancelled.

ARMC11/25 ITEMS OF TOPICAL INTEREST.

There were no items of topical interest.

4.44 pm

Chairman