



### **Councillor Karl Arthur – Chair of Audit and Governance Committee**

The Committee has met twice since the last update provided to the Council on 28 September 2021. The meetings took place on Wednesday 29 September 2021 and Wednesday 26 January 2022.

#### **Audit and Governance Committee Meeting – 29 September 2021**

This committee meeting had 14 agenda items on it. Amongst the items covered the committee considered the Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for the municipal years April 2019 to March 2020 and April 2020 to March 2021. Members were informed that the Local Authority Ombudsman was the final stage for corporate complaints made against local authorities and that during this period there had been a decrease in the number of complaints escalated to the Ombudsman against the Council and that none of these complaints had been upheld and that the Council showed a 100% record of implementation of any recommendations made by the Ombudsman.

It was further explained that Licensing and Democratic Services were part of the Legal service area which has recorded a total of three complaints and members noted that since the report had been written a licensing complaint had been resolved as it was a service request, a Democratic Services complaint had been referred to the Ombudsman and not been upheld; and a “right to buy” transaction which had experienced delays, had been resolved via the North Yorkshire County Council Better Together Legal Service. Following the discussion, the Committee was assured that the complaints process was operating effectively and to a high standard.

Members considered the Corporate Policy: Regulations of Investigating Powers Act 2020 (RIPA2020), version 2021 and heard that the Council had a duty under RIPA 2020 to demonstrate how requests for covert directed surveillance activities were determined and recorded. In response to a question regarding increasing the number of CCTVs within the district to counter act fly tipping, it was confirmed that if this was overt surveillance, which included signs being displayed next to cameras, additional CCTV could be installed.

If a serious case of fly tipping occurred, which was being investigated, and it was considered that covert CCTV be warranted, before use of the covert CCTV could take place that case would have to go through the RIPA process and onto the Magistrates Court for final approval before the cameras could be deployed. In response to queries from members as to which officers had been trained within the

Council to authorise the deployment of covert cameras it was confirmed that the determining officers were the Director of Economic Regeneration and Place, the Director of Corporate Services and the Head of Planning; with the Chief Executive dealing with cases which involved confidential information. It was further explained that the Enforcement Team had been trained to complete the application form to seek authorisation to deploy covert cameras. It was also confirmed that fly tipping was considered a serious enough offence to warrant covert CCTV but only on a case-by-case basis. Members noted the revised draft Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act Policy.

Members received the Corporate Policy and Guidance: surveillance Overview Document and the Overt Surveillance Policy: Version 2021 and were informed that any overt surveillance policy by the council must be monitored in terms of its authorisation and use. The committee heard that the Information Governance policies had been refreshed, and that all policies had been drafted in association with Veritau, the Internal Auditors, who acted as the Councils Data Protection Officers. The Committee noted this report.

The Committee also considered the draft Statement of Accounts for 2020-21 which it approved subject to the completion and signing off of the Audit of the Accounts. In addition, the committee also received and considered:

- The External Audit Completion Report 2020-21; and
- The Quarterly Internal Audit, Counter Fraud and Information Governance progress reports from Veritau.

Both of which the Committee duly noted.

### **Audit and Governance Committee Meeting – 26 January 2022**

This agenda had 14 items on it. Amongst the items covered I informed members during my chairs address that the authority had received a letter from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and relevant Audit Firms that an update be provided on the action the government was taking to help local authorities tackle audit delays. I highlighted that any changes resulting from these measures would be incorporated into the future audit work planning and that the committee would be updated on any relevant issues relating to these changes. Members noted that Selby District Council had not experienced any significant issues in the completion of the final accounts audit but that there were some authorities that had not yet signed off their accounts for 2020-21 due largely to the impact of COVID and remote working.

The Chief Finance Officer presented the Annual Report of Information Requests for 2021 and members noted that the authority had maintained an 85.99% response rate within the 20 day time limit during the year which was felt to be a good response owing to the issues the pandemic had caused over the year.

Members received the External Auditors Annual Report for 2021 and queried how confident the external auditors were that all the audit work had been captured as the work had been undertaken remotely and if the auditors were confident with this way

of working, should audits be conducted remotely in future. It was confirmed that the majority of clients had learned to work remotely and that the external auditors were in discussion with clients to see what best suited their needs, there was general agreement that a hybrid situation would work well in the future.

Members received and noted the External Audit Progress Report which set out a summary of external audit work completed to date on the 2020-21 financial statements along with the progress made on the 2021-22 audit planning work which once completed would be presented to the committee meeting in April 2022.

Members also received the quarterly Internal Audit Counter Fraud and Information Governance Progress Report for 2021-22 and resolved to note the progress on the delivery of this work and accepted the plans for work to be completed in 2021-22.

The review of the Risk Management Strategy set out the reviewed strategy for managing risk within the authority following consultation with the leadership team of the authority. The Committee noted that the strategy still aligned with objectives of the council in terms of corporate priorities and that therefore the strategy remained unchanged following the review. Members then discussed the forecasts for inflation, the potential for interest rate increases, the rising cost of living and the potential for a recession to occur and how this would impact on both social and political risks and noted the revisions to the strategy.

The Committee received and noted the Corporate Risk Register and were informed that there was currently a total of 12 risks on the register for 2021-22, with no new risks having been identified or added. During the discussion on the item it was highlighted that the Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) risk had been updated to reflect the government announcement that the Unitary North Yorkshire proposal has been accepted. It was agreed that this offered clarity around plans for the future.

Members received the Annual Counter Fraud Framework updating the Committee on the review of the authorities Fraud and Corruption Policy with the recommendation to update the policy to include specific anti-bribery provisions. The report also provided an update on progress against the actions set out in the Counter Fraud Strategy and presented an updated Counter Fraud Risk Assessment which reflected the current fraud risks facing the council. They resolved to recommend that the Executive Committee approve the updated Counter Fraud and Corruption Policy and to note the updated Fraud Risk Assessment and Counter Fraud Strategy Action Plan.

Members received and noted the Annual Governance Action Plan Review for 2020-21 and the progress which had been against the plan.

Finally, Members also agreed to recommend to council that it accepts a Public Sector Audit Appointments invitation to opt into the sector-led option for the appointments of external auditors to principal local government and police bodies for five financial years from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

## **Next Meeting of the Committee**

The next meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee will be taking place on Wednesday 27 April 2022 commencing at 5.00pm.

I commend my statement to the council.

**Councillor Karl Arthur**  
**Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee**