

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE AUDIT & MEMBER STANDARDS COMMITTEE



Chair of the Audit & Member Standards Committee

Date: 27 April 2021
Agenda Item: 8
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Key Decision? NO
Local Ward Members: The Report is general, with no details of a ward-specific nature

AUDIT & MEMBER STANDARDS COMMITTEE

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report presents the proposed Annual Report of the Audit & Member Standards Committee 2020/21 and seeks the Audit & Member Standards Committee's endorsement prior to its submission to all Councillors.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the proposed Annual Report of the Audit & Member Standards Committee 2020/21 (**Appendix 1**) be endorsed and that the Chair of the Audit & Member Standards Committee circulate the report to all Councillors.

3. Background

- 3.1 Audit Committees are an important source of assurance about an organisation's arrangements for managing risk, maintaining an effective control environment and reporting on financial and other performance.
- 3.2 CIPFA recommend that Audit Committees produce an annual report to promote the role and purpose of the Committee, account for the Committee's performance, evaluate whether the Committee is continuing to meet its terms of reference and document how the Committee adds value. The Audit & Member Standards Committee's annual report fulfilling these requirements is set out at **Appendix 1**.
- 3.3 The annual report sets out:
- An introduction from the Chair of the Committee.
 - A reminder of the Committee's terms of reference.
 - Member and Officer attendance at the Committee during the year.
 - A summary of training undertaken by Committee members.
 - A summary of the sources of assurance that the Committee received during 2020/21, notably, internal and external audit / inspection, financial management, risk management and corporate governance.

Alternative Options	The Council is not obliged by law to appoint an Audit & Member Standards Committee. However, this has been done in line with good governance practice and CIPFA guidance.
Consultation	The Audit & Member Standards Committee's consultation and endorsement has been sought.
Financial Implications	None.
Contribution to the Delivery of the Strategic Plan	Operation of an effective Audit & Member Standards Committee contributes to all aspects of delivery of the Council's Strategic Plan.
Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications	None arising.
Crime & Safety Issues	None arising.
Environmental Impact	None arising.
GDPR/Privacy Impact Assessment	This has been a key area as part of the committee's work programme and challenge during the year.

	Risk Description	How We Manage It	Severity of Risk (RYG)
A	The Audit & Member Standards Committee is ineffective and does not fulfil the requirements of its terms of reference.	Annual reviews of committee effectiveness, work programmes	Likelihood – Green Impact – Green Severity of Risk - Green (tolerable).
B	The value of the Committee's work is not known to the wider Council / organisation / the public.	Promotion of the work of the Committee via the annual report process	Likelihood – Green Impact – Green Severity of Risk - Green (tolerable).

Background documents Audit & Member Standards Committee agendas, minutes and reports.

Relevant web links https://democracy.lichfielddc.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=134
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Annual Report of the Audit & Member Standards Committee 2020/21

1. Introduction from the Chair of the Audit Committee

The start of the financial year commenced with major uncertainty in many aspects of the Authority's operations, due to Covid-19 issues. The normal income levels were particularly expected to be adversely affected, but unpredictable. The expenditure on Covid-19 related support was largely unbudgeted and uncertain in relation to any confirmed coverage by central government grants.

In relation to the committee's work, this has been entirely online with officers working largely from home. Best practice guidance on management of the online format of meetings is to keep the agenda light and without complex issues to be debated. This guidance is perverse for the Audit & Member Standards Committee, with its remit to examine the complicated organisational matters in detail, so this contradiction has been achieved well, under the circumstances.

The work of the Audit Committee meetings should be visible to members of the public and, as such, meetings have been held remotely via Zoom and broadcast live on YouTube streams. This availability appears to have been well received by a number of viewers. Anyone interested in seeing the committee in action should contact the Council in advance of meetings.

The Annual Report's main purpose is to allow the Council to demonstrate to residents, stakeholders and partners, the significance of the Audit & Member Standards Committee's role and the positive contribution it has made to the Council's overall governance arrangements.

The internal audit programme completion level has been high when compared to the agreed plan and the number of concerns identified throughout the programme have been few. Members have been able to interrogate further where there have been instances of less than adequate assurances.

As we ended the 2020/21 financial year, the District Council continued with Grant Thornton UK as its External Auditor but welcomed a new Lead Engagement team for the 2021/22 audit. There is also a new shared Head of Audit, under the internal audit shared service arrangement with Tamworth Borough Council.

The Committee has appreciated the support and assurance the audit personnel have given from these arrangements. Those audit providers who are moving on to other duties have been well received for their positive and proactive approaches to these functions and we look forward to the refresh that the new input will allow.

I am therefore thankful for all members and officers who have contributed to the work of the committee over the last 12 months but particularly in the more challenging circumstances created by Covid-19 influences.

As recovery continues from the pandemic, there will be an emerging programme of work planned. This will include seeking continuing assurance against the Council's response to Covid-19, the significant

financial challenges facing us, as well as continuing to ensure the Council’s overall governance framework remains fit for purpose.

**Councillor Colin Greatorex,
Chair of the Audit & Member Standards Committee 2020/21
April 2021**

2. Terms of Reference

The terms of reference, which the Committee operated to during 2020/21, is detailed at Part 3 of the Council’s constitution at the following link:

<https://democracy.lichfielddc.gov.uk/documents/s8011/Part%203%20Final%20v4.pdf>

3. Member and Officer Attendance

The Audit & Member Standards Committee met 6 times during the 2020/21 municipal year.

Membership of the Audit & Member Standards Committee during the 2020/21 municipal year and their attendance is detailed below:

Audit & Member Standards Committee Member	Date of Committee Meeting					
	22/07/20	07/10/20	12/11/20	03/02/21	25/03/21	27/04/21
Councillor Colin Greatorex	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Councillor Wai-Lee Ho	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Councillor Jamie Checkland	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Councillor Joanne Grange	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Councillor Alastair Little	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Councillor Steven Norman	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Councillor Dave Robertson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Councillor Christopher Spruce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Councillor Alan White	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

A number of the Audit & Member Standards Committee Members also sat on various other Committees. There were no reports received during the year that necessitated members absenting themselves.

Senior officers from the council also attend the Audit & Member Standards Committee meetings as appropriate, including the Head of Finance & Procurement (Section 151), Head of Governance & Performance (Monitoring Officer) and the Shared Head of Audit. The External Auditors also attend and the Cabinet Member for Finance, Procurement, Customer Services and Revenues & Benefits usually observes.

4. Training & Effectiveness

On 30 November 2020 virtual member training took place covering Communications, Safeguarding and Governance hosted by the Head of Governance & Performance (Monitoring Officer). No specific Audit Committee training has taken place since November 2019, but this will be addressed this coming year.

As part of the Committee’s effectiveness review a skills audit will be completed which will shape the future training and development of the Committee in 2021/22.

5. Sources of Assurance during 2020/21

In fulfilling its terms of reference, the business conducted by the Audit & Member Standards Committee during 2020/21 is detailed at **Appendix A** per the following themes: -

- Internal Audit
- External Audit / Inspection
- Financial Management
- Risk Management
- Corporate Governance

The Committee gained assurance in 2020/21 from these themes as follows:-

Internal Audit

In respect of the 2019/20 financial year, a positive Internal Audit Opinion was given from the Shared Head of Audit as follows:

On the basis of our audit work, our opinion on the council's framework of governance, risk management and internal control is adequate in its overall design and effectiveness. Certain weaknesses and exceptions were highlighted by our audit work. These matters have been discussed with management, to whom we have made recommendations. All of these have been, or are in the process of being addressed.

External Audit / Inspection

The main responsibility of the External Auditor is to report on the Council's Accounts and whether the council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. Grant Thornton reported on the 2019/20 Accounts. In Grant Thornton's Annual Audit Report, where they issued an unqualified opinion on both the 2019/20 Accounts and in terms of the value for money assessment, they concluded that:-

Conclusion

On the basis of our work, having regard to the guidance on the specified criterion issued by the Controller and Auditor General in April 2020, we are satisfied that the Authority put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2020. We certify that we have completed the audit of the financial statements of the Lichfield District Council in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Code of Audit Practice.

The Committee also received positive assurance on the Council's arrangements for the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act from the Investigatory Powers Commissioners' Office.

Financial Management

The Committee scrutinised the 2019/20 Statement of Accounts and also received assurances on the Council's financial management arrangements (e.g. treasury management, prudential indicators) from the Head of Finance & Procurement (Section 151 Officer). The Committee also received regular Internal Audit Progress Reports, including a number giving assurance on financial management and controls during the period. The Committee also received assurance on compliance against the new Financial Management Code.

Regular updates on the adequacy of the Council's counter fraud arrangements were also taken including the approval of the suite of counter fraud and corruption policies (counter fraud and corruption policy statement, strategy and guidance notes; whistleblowing policy, anti-money laundering policy and prevention of tax evasion policy).

6. Conclusion

The Committee has been able to confirm that there were no areas of significant duplication or omission in the systems of governance in the authority that had come to the Committee's attention during 2020/21 that were not being adequately resolved.

Through members receiving this report, the role and purpose of the Committee has been promoted and it has demonstrated that the Committee has continued to perform, meet its terms of reference and added value. This work will continue in 2021/22 with the Committee's refreshed work programme.

Summary of Audit & Member Standards Committee Work Plan by Assurance Theme 2020/21

Meeting Date	Report	Assurance Theme				
		Internal Audit	External Audit / Inspection	Financial Management	Risk Management	Corporate Governance
22/07/20	Annual Treasury Management Report			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	Annual Governance Statement			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	External Audit – Audit Plan/Annual Audit fee letter/informing the risk assessment		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
	Annual Report of Internal Audit	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
	Risk Management Update				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Internal Audit Plan, Charter & Protocol 20/21	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
	Quality Assurance & Improvement Programme/PSIAS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
	RIPA reports policy & monitoring					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
07/10/20	Accounting Policies			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	Statement of Accounts			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	Audit findings report 19/20		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
12/11/20	Mid-year Treasury Management Report			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	CIPFA Financial Management Code			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	Internal Audit Progress Report	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
	Risk Management Update				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Counter Fraud Update Report	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
	GDPR/Data Protection Policy					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
03/02/21	Treasury Management Statement and Prudential Indicators			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	Audit & Member Standards Committee Practical Guidance			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	Redmond Review Report			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	Internal Audit Progress Report	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
	Risk Management Update				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	The Annual Audit Letter for LDC		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
	Certification Work for LDC for year ended 31 March 2020		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
	Audit Committee LDC Progress Report and update year ended 31 March 2021		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			

Meeting Date	Report	Assurance Theme				
		Internal Audit	External Audit / Inspection	Financial Management	Risk Management	Corporate Governance
25/03/21	Accounting Policies and Estimation Uncertainty			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	Internal Audit Plan, Charter & Protocol 20/21	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
	GDPR	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
	Annual Report on Exceptions & Exemptions to Procedure Rules 2019/20					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	External Auditors Audit Plan 20/21		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
	Informing the Audit Risk Assessment – LDC		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
27/04/21	Annual Governance Statement			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	Annual Report for Internal Audit incl year-end Internal Audit Progress Report	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
	Risk Management Update				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Chair of the Audit Committee's Annual Report to Council					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Review of the Effectiveness of the Audit & Member Standards Committee					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Independent External Investigation					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Audit Committee LDC Progress Report and Update year ended 31 March 2021		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
	Annual Audit Fee Letter 20/21		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			