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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Audit Committee held
at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Thursday, 13th June, 2019 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor P White (Chairman)
County Councillor J. Higginson (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: A. Easson, M. Feakins, M. Lane, P. Murphy,
V. Smith, B. Strong, J. Watkins and S. Woodhouse

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Andrew Wathan	Chief Internal Auditor
Annette Evans	Customer Relations Manager
Peter Davies	Chief Officer, Resources
Tracey Harry	Head of People Services and Information Governance
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Richard Jones	Performance Manager
David Walton	Audit Manager

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

David Wilson	Wales Audit Office
Terry Lewis	Wales Audit Office

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor P. Clarke

1. Election of Chair

Mr. P. White was elected as Chairman.

2. Appointment of Vice Chair

County Councillor J. Higginson was appointed as Vice Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

4. Public Open Forum

No members of the public were present.

5. To note the action list from the last meeting.

The Action List from the last meeting was noted, and updates provided as follows:

- Performance Management: The Chief Officer, Resources updated the Committee regarding annual staff appraisals. It was explained that there are difficulties collating the data on annual appraisals corporately. The ability to add details of staff appraisals to a

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module of the MyView payroll system has been deployed but currently, there are some issues with the full functionality of the system. Feedback from Managers suggests that there is no standard approach to appraisal owing to the diverse nature of the workforce.

Steps have been taken to add a record of completion of staff appraisal to the established business planning process, reinforcing the need for every member of staff to have an annual appraisal. Quarter 1 data including action points for areas of performance requiring improvement will be reported at a future meeting.

Members requested a positive response for the next meeting. The Officer explained that it had been hoped that the module within MyView would have provided the complete information to provide an accurate report and the move to the business planning process should facilitate this. It was commented that an appraisal is an opportunity to build empowerment.

Reassurance was provided that SLT and DMT have assured that appraisals are being held and staff members are being met with regularly. A further report will be provided in September.

- Anti-Bribery Compliance: The Chief Officer, Resources confirmed that the annual risk register will be presented at the July meeting.
- Forward Work Plan: The Chair encouraged full population of the plan.
- IT Risk register: The Chief Officer explained that a composite risk register is being finalised within the Digital Officer's business plan and this will be presented at the July meeting.

6. Audit Committee Annual Report 2018/19

The Chair's report of the business of the Audit Committee last year was approved and will be presented to County Council on 18th July 2019. The Committee Chair will attend the meeting to answer any questions that may arise.

It was agreed that there is value in the Audit Committee holding Officers to account. Members noted the comprehensive range of work covered during the year.

7. Draft Annual Governance Statement 2018/19

The Chief Internal Auditor presented the draft Annual Governance Statement that sits alongside the Statement of Accounts and is based on the seven principles of good governance. It covers how the council carries out its governance.

A Member commented that it was a lengthy and repetitive document, and requested that it is condensed in future. A commitment to improve these aspects was given.

A question was asked about the evaluation of safeguarding in the various establishments that provide care for residents that are under the responsibility of Care Inspectorate Wales, are situated within Monmouthshire but are outside the remit of the authority to ensure there are adequate standards of care. It was responded that the governance statement provides reassurance on governance and control arrangements for the services run by the authority and that are commissioned. For those establishments outside the authority's control, other bodies are accountable. Concerns about establishments within the authority's remit could be raised with the Adults or Children and Young People Select Committees.

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A Member commented that the purpose of the statement is to ensure public money is safeguarded, properly accounted and used economically, efficiently and effectively. Therefore it should be reaffirmed and strengthened.

It was noted that the Internal Audit Team has a full complement of staff and that 84% of the Internal Audit work programme has been achieved (similar to previous years). It was queried how to plan to ensure that work is not left undone. The Chief Internal Auditor explained that intention is to achieve 100% of the plan according to the resources available and there are multiple reasons for achieving less than 100% such as overruns on individual jobs due to unforeseen complexities, and other changes during the year. Assurance was provided that any work not completed is prioritised in the following year. Further, it was also explained that some jobs will be ongoing at year end and also the amount of time allocated for special investigations is estimated only.

The Audit Committee endorsed the draft report.

8. Internal Audit Annual Report 2018/19

The Chief Internal Auditor presented the Annual Report for Internal Audit for 2018/19 which considers the work undertaken during the year and the opinions issued to enable an overall opinion to be given on the adequacy of internal control arrangements as required by the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The overall opinion was Reasonable. Of 32 audit opinion jobs, 6 reviews were given Limited assurance. A 6 monthly update of the 6 limited opinions will be provided.

Secondly, it reports on the accountability of the Chief Internal Auditor and the performance of the team. The Internal Audit team achieved 84% of the agreed 2018/19 audit plan against a target of 82%.

A Member referred to the 98% of recommendations accepted by managers and was informed that circumstances why recommendations wouldn't be accepted may include the manager disagreeing with the risk identified and being comfortable to manage it or the need for a new system where the necessary resources outweigh the benefit of the reduced risk. An additional audit comment would be added in such circumstances. The final report goes to the Head of Service to ensure they are aware of the recommendation.

The Committee endorsed the report.

9. Internal Audit Final Plan 2019/20

The Chief Internal Auditor presented the Internal Audit Final Plan for 2019/20 and invited questions from the Committee:

- It was confirmed that the Chief Internal Auditor role is a shared role with Newport City Council in the proportion of 50:50 from 2019/20.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, stated that the report had been reviewed and approved.

10. Wales Audit Office Certificate of Compliance for the Audit of Monmouthshire County Council's 2019/20 Improvement Plan

The Committee welcomed the Wales Audit Officer to the meeting to present the report on the Certificate of Compliance for the Council's 2019/20 Improvement Plan.

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The certificate was noted by the Committee and the Wales Audit Officer thanked for attending.

11. Service User Perspective Review, Customer contact - plus managers response

The Wales Audit Officer provided a presentation on the Service User Perspective Review of Customer Contact. The review concentrated on user perspectives of Community Hubs, the MyMon App and the Compliments, Comments and Complaints Procedure.

The outcomes overall were that citizens were mostly satisfied with the access and quality of customer contact arrangements, but that the Council could do more to take users' needs into account in their design and effectiveness.

There was positive feedback regarding the Hubs and MyMon app, and the Compliments, Comments and Complaints process is well set out.

Regarding complaints, it was commented that it can be difficult to find the right person to contact and some users were less satisfied with complaint handling. There were concerns that service user perception might be swayed by the complaint outcome and it was clarified that the review dealt with process and not the outcome. It was felt to be important that the Council takes these messages on board.

It was found that the Council has arrangements to engage with residents but this does not always result in effective two-way conversation. It was recommended that the Council could proactively seek service user experiences.

The Head of Policy and Governance presented the management response noting that a comprehensive analysis of compliments, comments and complaints is provided to Audit Committee on an annual basis. The Customer Relations Manager provided context that for the review period of 2017/18, 89 complaints were received. 77 complaints were considered in the review and the Wales Audit Office spoke to 24 of the complainants which was felt to be a small representation. 12 of the 24 complainants were dissatisfied and 12 satisfied or partly satisfied. 8 were dealt with at stage 1 of the complaints process (within timescales) and 16 at stage 2, of which 7 went over the required 30 days.

The aim is that complainants are contacted within 5 days, but noted that investigations start later and this may lead to some misinterpretation; this could be made clearer.

It was noted that there are opportunities for complainants to express dissatisfaction but it may be beneficial to send out a user satisfaction form about the process at the end of Stage 1 and Stage 2. It was suggested that complainants don't differentiate between process and outcome and where a complaint is not upheld, complainants are unlikely to be satisfied.

It was confirmed that the standard complaints policy format (as provided by the Ombudsman) is followed but that the policy will also be reviewed shortly.

The Performance Manager provided the management response noting that arrangements will be strengthened where necessary together with other improvements having reflected on the service users' feedback.

In response to a question, it was explained that only 2 complaints had proceeded to the Ombudsman in the review period and no further referrals were made from the 10 not completed at the time of the review.

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A Member agreed that understanding the outcome was an important part of the context of the review and commented that unfavourable outcomes would naturally provoke negative feedback and balance is required. It was added that the report could be more meaningful with more contextual information e.g. differentiation between complaints and gripes, and identifying where multiple complaints are made. It was accepted that the 24 responses was a low number but even if complainants were dissatisfied, it is valid feedback for the council to take into account when reviewing its processes.

A Member reminded the Committee that there is instantly available information on the Chatbot and Facebook.

A Member asked how the authority compares with other authorities but this information was not available as each review has a different focus. It was agreed that timing is key and complaints easily escalate if not dealt with in a timely way.

It was confirmed that there is a 6 monthly report that includes progress against proposals for improvement.

The Committee noted the report.

12. Well-being of Future Generations: An examination of developing a range of options to improve rural transport - plus managers response

The Wales Audit Office representative explained that this is a different type of report that considers the progress being made to improve rural transport as one of the steps being developed under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015. It was found:

- The Council has acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle in setting the step 'to develop a range of options to improve rural transport' but there are opportunities to further embed the five ways of working.
- The Council has identified some of the problems caused by the lack of rural transport but has not yet identified potential solutions
- Whilst there are positive examples of stakeholder involvement, the Council could benefit from involving the public at an earlier stage and producing comprehensive equality impact assessments for all policy decisions on major service change.
- The Council is committed to integrated solutions but rural transport is not well recognised within Council and partner plans
- The Council has started to collaborate in the planning and scoping of some solutions and would benefit from engaging with more partners to identify root causes and additional sustainable solutions.

The management response is contained within the report and was explained by the Head of Governance, and information was provided about the GovTech scheme.

A Member asked where and when £3 million had been spent for Active Travel and requested a written response. It was remarked that this funding was earmarked for spending by March 2019 and a written response will be provided. It was clarified that the Strategic Transport Group has not been involved in the GovTech scheme.

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A Member asked how the improvements would be brought about commenting that the Council was unclear about partners' willingness to participate. An examples was provided where there was an opportunity to provide non-emergency health transport in Mon CC and there are other gaps that could be provided in other ways for consideration. Analysis is in progress to assess the true demand for transport in the area. The data can be used to bring new suppliers into the area. Work with partners can be activated by the Public Service Board. A Member supported more input from residents.

The Wales Audit Officer clarified that areas for development are not areas for improvement.

The Committee noted the presentation.

13. Forward Work Plan

The Forward Work Plan was noted.

14. To confirm minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed and signed as a true record.

15. To confirm the date of the next meeting as 25th July 2019

The meeting ended at 3.46 pm