

AUDIT AND CORPORATE SERVICES REVIEW COMMITTEE

11 November 2020

Present: Councillor D Clements (Chair)
Mrs S Hoss, Councillor M James, Mr G Jones, Councillor P Kidney,
Councillor R Owens and Councillor M Williams.

[Dr R Heath Davies joined the meeting during consideration of the Internal Audit Report (*Minute 4 refers*).]

(Virtual Meeting: 10.00am-12.40pm)

The Committee paused at 11am for a minute's silence to mark Remembrance Day

1. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor P Baker.

2. Disclosures

There were no disclosures of interest.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 8 July 2020 were presented for confirmation and authentication.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2020 be confirmed and authenticated.

4. Internal Audit Report 2020/21

The Chair welcomed Jonathan Maddock from ttaa, the Authority's Internal Auditors. He explained that his report was in several parts – a Summary Internal Controls Assurance Report, together with reviews of Staff Wellbeing and Absence Management, Key Financial Controls, Governance – Strategic Planning and a Departmental Review of Education – and he took Members through the documents. It was noted that the progress against the planned work for the quarter had been disrupted by the COVID pandemic and had been undertaken remotely.

The review of Staff Wellbeing and Absence Management had received a Limited evaluation, with no urgent, but a number of important priorities identified. However areas of good practice were also highlighted in the report.

Members were concerned that staff were not being adequately supported upon their return to work. However the HR Manager reassured them that although documentary evidence could not necessarily be provided to the



auditors, for example in relation to return to work interviews, meetings had been taking place but documents was not always being held centrally. He added that a new Return to Work Interview form had been rolled out and the new HR system (to be implemented in January 2021), together with additional training, would allow for better reporting, control and follow through.

It was reported that the review of Education had received a reasonable assurance with two important priorities identified. These related to incomplete records of DBS (Data Barring Service) accreditation and safeguarding training. The HR Manager confirmed the report findings that this activity had only recently been passed across to the HR department. Members were advised that action had already taken place to tighten control of the evidencing process, and it was stated that DBS checks and training were taking place but documentation had previously not been kept to evidence this action.

The assurance reviews of Governance – Strategic Planning and of key Financial Controls had both been given substantial assurance and Members wished to congratulate those teams

NOTED.

5. COVID-19: Communications Recovery Planning

The report before the Committee provided an overview of the Authority's communications in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the success to date of the "Communicating out of COVID-19" recovery plan. It acknowledged that despite the challenging circumstances, there had been opportunities to engage with new audiences and to develop new partnerships which it was hoped would continue beyond the pandemic. The Plan had been designed to give assurance, focus and consistency in external communications and provided a sense of hope that, in the midst of a global crisis the Authority could see positives in how its audiences engaged with, and appreciated, protected landscapes.

Members commended the report, which had been praised both locally and at a wider level and asked that their thanks be passed on to the Communications Team. The work with social media had been particularly successful, however Members highlighted the opportunities for drawing attention to new destinations via more traditional means such as television.

NOTED.



6. Budget Performance Report for 6 months to September 2020

The report of the Finance Manager set out the detailed net revenue budget for the six months to September 2020 which showed the actual and committed expenditure was £2,433k, £22k over the profiled budget. The main reasons for the variance of actual expenditure against budget for each service department was set out in the report.

The forecast revenue position for the 2020/21 year end was expected to show a deficit of £142, versus a nil surplus in the original budget. This variance was due mainly to a loss of income from the Authority's Centres and car parks following their closure due to COVID-19, together with additional costs for vehicle hire. However the Authority had mitigated the loss of income by obtaining additional support grants totalling £487k from both Welsh and UK Governments.

The capital programme had significantly increased from the original budget due to an award from the Welsh Government under their Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places grant scheme, with details of the projects funded set out in the report.

Turning to the Authority's Reserves, it was reported that the general Reserve was expected to reduce to £977k at the end of the current financial year due to the contribution towards the anticipated deficit. Earmarked and Capital Receipts Reserves were also expected to fall to fund previously planned projects.

The Chief Executive added that while a deficit budget was not to be welcomed, projections earlier in the year had indicated that the financial situation could have been worse had compensatory grants not been forthcoming. Budgeting for the next financial year remained challenging and a workshop would be held for Members in December at which this would be discussed. The potential closure of Carew Castle and Castell Henllys for the winter months was raised and Members indicated that they would be supportive of this, but noted that a clear message should be communicated to indicate the temporary nature of this decision for safety and financial reasons.

NOTED.

7. Performance Report for the Period ending 30 September 2020

The report followed the structure of the Corporate and Resources Plan for 2020/21. The Plan was in two parts - the first section was based on progress against short and mid-term priorities focused on the Authority's COVID-19 response and recovery planning, while the second section outlined progress against work streams that contributed to the longer term delivery of the Authority's Well-being Objectives and impacts within the



National Park Management Plan. This section going forward would provide insight into the impact of COVID-19 and recovery on long term delivery and projects across well-being objectives. Some activities within work streams might be progressed during 2020/21, however a number of them, particularly those involving face to face contact between individuals, may not be able to progress until restrictions were partially or fully lifted. In some cases this would mean that activities under some work streams might not be carried out during 2020/21. Activities under work streams would be subject to further review during the year to assess whether they remained relevant or needed to be updated to align with recovery plans.

The report presented the performance to 30 September 2020 for monthly and quarterly data. The Performance and Compliance coordinator highlighted a number of measures and actions to the Committee in relation to COVID-19 restrictions and recovery, as well as for planning services, supporting home working and improved communications and health and safety. The report also provided an update on work towards longer-term objectives. It was noted that the report contained a typographical error in that the Local Development Plan had been adopted on 30th September 2020.

Thanking the officer for the update on activities as a result of COVID-19 provided in the narrative, one Member nevertheless would have liked revised targets to be provided for those activities that had been affected. The officer replied that while the measures and targets would be revised next year, it was difficult at this point to know what the impact of COVID 19 would be to set revised actual targets for this year.

Another Member questioned the red RAG rating against the percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice as he believed that this was a positive result of Member-led decision making. Officers advised that this was a Welsh Government target to allow comparison of Authorities across Wales. The Member suggested that the issue be raised with Welsh Government.

A question was also asked regarding the backlog in the planning system and the Director of Planning and Park Direction reassured Members that consultants and additional staff had been taken on to address the problems, with reviews with staff being undertaken every few weeks to consider any further support that was required.

NOTED



8. Risk Register

Members were asked to consider the latest risk register, which had been reviewed by the Leadership Team. The main changes from the previous report were highlighted.

The Internal Auditor pointed out that the risk scoring in relation to risk 7 was mathematically incorrect for both the inherent and residual risks, and the Finance Manager agreed to correct these figures.

At Members' request, updates were provided in relation to Brexit (Risk 39), IT failure (Risk 20), outstanding debts (Risk 42) and Ash Die Back (Risk 43). It was questioned whether there was any greater risk of falling trees or branches (Risk 32) as a result of Ash Die Back, and the Finance Manager advised that the Authority had a robust tree inspection protocol, however he would re-appraise the risk.

NOTED.

9. Health and Safety Update

The report listed accidents and incidents reported between July and September 2020 and summarised the action taken in response to each. It was noted that there had been one incident that was reportable to the Health and Safety Executive under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR). The report went on to provide an update on a number of project areas, including the Authority's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and training and development.

Since writing the report, the most recent 'firebreak' had ended and the Centres had reopened. Most office staff, it was reported, were still working from home and Home Working Risk Assessments had been carried out and IT and other equipment provided to ensure safe working at home.

It was also reported that a meeting of the Health and Safety Group had been arranged for 26 November; the minutes of which would be reported to the next meeting.

Members were keen to understand whether any staff had been diagnosed with work related stress, and whether difficulties in accessing healthcare had impacted their ability to get a timely diagnosis. The HR Manager replied that of the small number of staff currently off work due to stress, none had identified this as purely work related. He commented that Return to Work meetings for those returning and Absence Review Meetings for those remaining on sick leave were being carried out to fully



understand both the personal and work related triggers, so that support could be provided.

He advised that the Authority was supported by Pembrokeshire County Council's Occupational Health Team, and also subscribed to two counselling services which staff could access independently. Work would continue in 2021 to provide additional support mechanisms for staff, such as signposting to charities and other organisations as part of a corporate wellbeing initiative.

NOTED.

10. Carbon Footprint 2019/20

The Building Projects Manager explained that the report before the Committee was a collaboration between a number of officers within the Authority and presented the 2019/20 carbon footprint calculation, together with the next steps that would be taken to reduce the Authority's carbon footprint.

The figure for 2019/20 had remained around 900,000 tons of CO² and had been undertaken using the DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) carbon calculator for Green House Gas, however it was noted that Welsh Government was currently trialling a new calculation method to ensure an improved measurement and a coordinated calculation method across all public sector authorities in Wales. The new method would be adopted by the Authority once it was available.

Members were pleased to note the reduction in relation to both direct and indirect transport and asked about the transition to hybrid and electric vehicles. The Business Improvement & IT Manager advised that electric vehicles were more expensive and there was currently no electric option for 4x4 vehicles, however the Authority had received Welsh Government funding which had allowed the purchase of 3 electric vans. The Building Projects Manager advised that additional funding had also been received for the installation of fast electric charging points and the Authority was working with Pembrokeshire County Council and Western Power Distribution to deliver the next phase of installations.

NOTED.



11. Delegation of any issues for consideration by the Continuous Improvement Group

It was **RESOLVED** that there were no issues of concern that the Committee wished to delegate to the Continuous Improvement Group for consideration.

The Minutes of this meeting were confirmed at the meeting of the Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee held on 10 February 2021 without amendment

