

Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee

17 May 2023

Present (in person)

Dr R Heath Davies (Chair)

Councillor S Alderman, Councillor D Clements, Mrs S Hoss, Mr G Jones, Councillor R Owens and Councillor Mrs S Skyrme-Blackhall.

[Councillor M James joined the meeting during consideration of the Audit Wales Audit Plan (Minute 5 refers)]

(Virtual Meeting: 10.00am -11.30am; 11.40am – 12.45pm)

1. **Apologies**

There were no apologies for absence.

2. **Disclosures**

There were no disclosures of interest.

3. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 1 March 2023 were presented for confirmation and authentication.

It was **RESOLVED** on the proposal of Councillor S Skyrme-Blackhall, seconded by Mr G Jones, that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2023 be confirmed and authenticated.

4. **Matters Arising/Action Log**

a) Action 860 –Workshop on Flooding/TAN 15

It was noted that this would take place following publication of the revised TAN which was anticipated at the start of June.

b) Action 864 – Health and Safety Group Terms of Reference

The Chief Executive noted that the revised Terms of Reference had been agreed at the meeting the previous day and would be circulated to the Committee for information.

NOTED.

5. **Audit Wales Audit Plan**

The Chair welcomed Jason Blewitt from Audit Wales to the meeting, and he outlined the programme of work for the next year, noting that a detailed Audit Plan would be provided later in the year. Particular attention was drawn to the timescale for audit of the financial statements which would this year take place in the Autumn, with finalisation of the



report by 30 November. In previous years this had taken place in July, however he explained that the delay had been caused firstly by a delay in finalising the audits of Councils in 2021/22 as a result of a need to account for infrastructure assets, but also the introduction of a new auditing standard ISA315. It was hoped that finalisation of the audit would be brought back by one month in each of the coming years. Turning to the fees for undertaking the Audit, Mr Blewitt advised that there would be an increase of 4.8% across the board, with the financial audit increasing by 15%; this was estimated to equate to £29.5k and £18.5k for the Authority's financial and performance audits respectively.

The Chief Executive thanked the Auditors for their clear report but noted that the changes were putting an increased burden on the Authority's limited resources. Members agreed and considered that it would be interesting whether the proportionality of the audit was reflected in the report on governance which was currently taking place.

NOTED.

6. Internal Audit Report 2022/23

The Chair welcomed Helen Cargill from the Authority's Internal Auditors TIAA to the meeting. She presented reports on the follow-up review, Conservation Management Schemes, Safeguarding and Performance, together with an indicative Annual Report. She noted that the ICT Disaster Recovery Plan had not yet been finalised, so would not form part of her report that day.

Turning first to the Follow-up report, it was noted that there were a number of actions with target deadlines that were overdue. Officers advised that an action log of all audit requirements would be created following receipt of all the documents and this would form a standing item on the agenda so that progress could be monitored. One Member queried the revised implementation date for the Employee Health and Wellbeing policy to be updated which was given as 31/03/25; Ms Cargill acknowledged that this could be a typographical error and agreed to check this.

The second and third reports related to the Conservation Management Schemes and Safeguarding Review, both of which had received a substantial assurance. There were no recommendations on the first report, and only three low priority recommendations in respect of Safeguarding. Members recognised that this was an important issue but were happy that the recommendations would be recorded in the action log.

It was reported that a reasonable assurance had been given to the performance management review with a number of important and routine



recommendations. The Chief Executive responded that this was an area of work where changes were currently being made and the recommendations would helpfully feed into the plans.

The final report was an indicative annual audit report, and it was noted that it was indicative because the disaster recovery report was still to be finalised. It was anticipated that this would have a limited assurance. The Chief Executive noted that the report would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee but the main reason for the outcome was due to the implementation of Microsoft 365 across the Authority taking priority over the Business Continuity Plan. However an action plan was being produced to take the work forward. The Internal Auditors were happy with the approach being taken and recognised the reason for the delay.

NOTED.

7. Performance Report for the Period ending 31 March 2023

The report followed the structure of the Corporate and Resources Plan for 2022/23. As the Authority was going through a period of change, a transitional performance measurement framework had been put in place for 2022/23.

The report presented the performance to date up to 31 March and included Q1 – Q4 statistics for some data sets recorded quarterly and highlighted those areas where targets were in red or amber or where positive progress had been made since the previous report. The officer noted a typographical error in respect of the percentage of planning applications determined within time period ytd which, although below target, was above rather than below the figure for the same period last year.

Members highlighted many positives in the report, but expressed concern regarding the figures for sickness absence which had shown an increase. They asked in particular whether staff working from home had proper arrangements in place to prevent back and neck problems. The Chief Executive reassured the Committee that the Authority had responded positively to requests for home working, and that staff were required to undertake display screen assessments to ensure appropriate working arrangements. The absence figures included a variety of non-work-related issues including loss of family members and recovery from planned surgery, however the situation would continue to be monitored.

Concern was also expressed regarding the increasing caseload for planning officers and the resulting stress, and Members asked whether additional staff were needed. The Director replied that caseloads were monitored, and most were below the Wales average. She added that despite difficulties in recruitment, additional planning officers had now



been employed and consultants had been used to help through peaks. It was hoped that additional recruitment would take place in the coming months in respect of enforcement. She also noted that a small number of complex applications had negatively impacted the percentage of applications determined within timescale.

NOTED

[The meeting was adjourned between 11.30am and 11.40am]

8. Health, Safety and Wellbeing

The report of the Health and Safety Project Manager outlined the work being undertaken in this area, and included figures for staff sickness for the year to date. Members sought further information regarding the RIDDOR incident and were reassured that the injury hadn't taken place on the day but had been the result of an historic injury which had been exacerbated by activity. Changes were being made to procedures as a result, and it was suggested that an item on the Authority's work with volunteers could be presented to Members in future.

Members also sought an update on the ongoing HAVS (Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome) response and officers replied that work on HAVS was continuing and a full update would be provided to the next meeting.

NOTED.

[Councillor S Skyrme-Blackhall tendered her apologies and left the meeting at this juncture]

9. Update on the Management of Ash Dieback Disease on the National Park's Estate

The report provided Members with an update on the progress with the Authority's management of trees with ash dieback across the Authority's estate since the last report in May 2021. In response to questions from Members, it was noted that there was an ongoing need to re-survey trees but that this had been built into existing work programmes and that it was hoped that work on those trees which needed to be felled could be undertaken by relevant teams. Assessments were undertaken on the appropriateness of leaving deadwood standing, and although much tree planting was taking place, consideration would be given to replacement planting in the longer term.

NOTED.

10. Risk Register

It was reported that the Risk Register had been reviewed by the Leadership Team, and the main changes since the previous report were



highlighted. In response to the discussion at the previous meeting, the risk strategy document had been appended to the report.

One Member questioned whether the residual risk scores in the report remained appropriate, and the Chief Executive replied that a Member Workshop to look at risk appetite was scheduled to take place in July when the appropriateness of different risks could be discussed further.

NOTED.

11. Budget Performance for the Twelve Months ending March 2023

The Finance Manager reported that it was hoped that preparation of the accounts would be completed by the end of June and presented to the next meeting of the Committee, however as noted under Minute 5, it would be some months before they were audited. In the interim, he noted that the income figures had recently been finalised and these showed an increase in sales, which were above levels recorded pre-pandemic, with admission fees showing a similar picture. Overall car park income was above budget, but below last year's figures. Due to the significant increase of income against budget, the forecast had been revised, with a surplus of £51k now expected, despite a greater pay award than had been anticipated.

NOTED.

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

Members asked that an analysis of staff sickness trends be provided at the next meeting.

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 12 July 2023 without amendment

