

# Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee

15 May 2024

## Present

Dr R Heath Davies (Chair)

Dr M Havard, Councillor B Price and Mrs V Thomas.

[Councillor D Clements and Councillor M James joined the meeting prior to consideration of the Action Log (Minute 4 refers); Councillor S Alderman arrived prior to consideration of the HAVS Update (Minute 10 refers).]

## Officers in attendance

Nigel Ireland (Internal Audit), Jason Blewitt (Audit Wales), Chief Executive, Head of Nature Recovery, Performance and Compliance Officer, Director of Placemaking, Decarbonisation and Engagement and Democratic Services Manager.

(Virtual Meeting: 10.00am -11.25am; 11.30am – 1.00pm)

### 1. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs S Hoss and Councillor S Skyrme-Blackhall. It was noted that Councillor S Alderman would be arriving later.

### 2. **Disclosures**

There were no disclosures of interest.

### 3. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 28 February 2024 were presented for confirmation and authentication.

On the proposal of Dr Havard, seconded by Dr Heath-Davies, it was **resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2024 be confirmed and authenticated.

### 4. **Action Log**

The updates provided in the table were **noted**.

### 5. **Report of the meeting of the Health and Safety Group held on 19 March 2024**

The minutes of the Health and Safety Group held on 19 March 2024 were **noted**.



## **6. Annual Audit Summary 2023**

It was reported that this summary document showed the work that had been completed by Audit Wales since February 2023. The Chair welcomed Jason Blewitt from Audit Wales' Financial Audit Team who presented the report, giving the apologies of Non Jenkins from the Performance Audit Team who was unable to be present.

Mr Blewitt noted that the national review of the effectiveness of governance of National Park Authorities had now been published, and would be presented to the June meeting of the Authority; while there had been some slippage of the planned work to look at promoting equality and diversity of access, timescales for completing this work would be discussed with the Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive noted that he had expressed concern to Audit Wales that very little performance work had been undertaken for the Authority during the year, however a meeting had been arranged to discuss this going forward. The Chair agreed that it was concerning that the Authority was paying for a service that it had not received. Mr Blewitt replied that an update would be provided to the next meeting of the Committee.

**Noted.**

## **7. Internal Audit Reports**

The Chair welcomed Nigel Ireland from Astari, the Authority's Internal Auditors. He noted that delivery of the 2023/24 Internal Audit Annual Plan was progressing well and there were no issues to report. It was noted that work was ongoing in respect of two further reports on the Coast Path and Information and Cyber Security and Data Protection and it was anticipated that these would be reported to the next meeting of the Committee. He thanked staff from across the organisation for their help in preparing the reports.

Four reports were presented to the Committee that day, the first of these related to Income Generation. The report concluded that the Authority could take reasonable assurance that the organisation was appropriately acting upon the recommendation made by Audit Wales in the Income Diversification report of June 2023. However, some control improvements were required to help ensure the continuous and effective mitigation of risks in this area. The assurance level provided reflected the recent establishment of some areas of control whose effectiveness the Internal Audit team were unable to measure as well as additional key controls, such as the Commercial Strategy, that were yet to be developed but the Authority had formal plans in place to deliver them. Two medium priority recommendations had been made and these would be included in the Internal Audit Action Log. Mr Ireland advised that the Commercial Strategy was a key document that the Authority intended to produce in



the coming financial year and the Chief Executive noted that this would be presented to a future meeting of the Authority.

The second report was a Value for Money (VfM) Advisory Review which sought to provide advice and guidance to help the Authority enhance its approach and strategy in respect of VfM and also consider the work undertaken by other similar organisations, social value and the impact of the Future Generations Act. Members were interested to know if there were good examples of VfM Strategies and the Auditor agreed to provide these to officers. The Chief Executive added that much work was currently being undertaken with regards to procurement and the resulting documents would be presented to the Authority later in the year.

Turning to the report on Key Financial Controls, it was reported that the Authority could take substantial assurance that there was an effective and consistently applied control framework in place to manage the risk that key financial controls operating within the Authority in relation to Purchase Ledger were in place and were effective. Both the Chief Executive and Members congratulated the Finance Team on a positive report given recent changes in personnel. Members noted the suggestion to review spending limits and Mr Ireland offered to provide advice on suggested percentage increases. The Chief Executive noted that as this was a suggested action, rather than a recommendation, it would be looked at later in the year.

The final report was a follow-up report which looked at previous management actions as agreed in response to internal audit recommendations, and it had concluded that the Authority had demonstrated Reasonable progress towards the implementation of agreed actions. It noted that one Medium priority recommendation was restated (regarding the IT Strategy) and one new Low priority recommendation (regarding the tracking of recommendations internally) and two Suggestions were raised, and these were detailed in the Action Plan. The Chief Executive replied that work to renew the ICT Strategy was currently underway, and a spreadsheet tracker had now been created to monitor recommendations, rather than the management response.

**Noted.**

## **8. Action Log for External Performance Audit and Internal Audit (Ending 31 March 2024)**

Members were reminded that following a request from Members, an Action Log for External Performance Audit and Internal Audit had been created to assist with monitoring of actions agreed from Audit reviews. The report provided an update on each of the actions, which had been categorised with a RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating, and it was noted that



these had now been added to the performance reporting system, to support co-ordination of monitoring of progress against actions.

The report highlighted that a number of high priority actions had now been completed, particularly in respect of the Risk Management Policy and the Business Continuity and ICT Disaster Recovery Plans, in addition to other medium priority actions.

Members were concerned that the introduction of an annual safeguarding report remained on hold. The Chief Executive provided reassurance that the Safeguarding Group continued to meet and there was very little to report, however a report would be provided. They also noted that there were a number of actions regarding staff wellbeing, and while some of these were being taken forward, they considered this to be an important area to progress. Finally with regard to health surveillance arrangements, the officer noted that a plan would be put in place to progress this action.

**Noted.**

#### **9. Health, Safety and Wellbeing Quarterly Report**

The report of the Health and Safety Project Manager, which was presented in his absence by the Chief Executive, updated the Committee on accidents and incidents for the year to date, progress in reviewing and updating Risk Assessments, training undertaken and an overview of the Health and Safety Culture survey undertaken earlier in the year. A dashboard of staff sickness statistics was also reported.

Members were disappointed to note the incidents of abuse, and were reassured that this was followed up as it was acknowledged that such incidents could have a negative impact on staff; in some cases they considered that its classification as 'near-miss' may not be appropriate.

**Noted.**

[The meeting was adjourned between 11.25am and 11.30am]

#### **10. Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) Update Report**

The Head of Nature Recovery provided an update on the Authority's work to improve the management of HAVS since the last report in November 2023. It highlighted that monitoring and review of control measures was ongoing, vibration testing of equipment continued and there had been investment in new electric equipment. It was noted that while changes to ways of working for the cutting season across the year, as a result of lower HAVS vibration targets for staff, had proved challenging, complaints remained low in line with previous years. However the prolonged wet and windy weather had significantly impact the ability of teams to access land and undertake some of their work programme over the winter.



In response to questions from Members, officers reported that there had been no further contact from the Health and Safety Executive but that they were confident that no outstanding issues remained and that the challenges had resulted in stronger cross-team working.

**NOTED.**

**11. Well-being Objectives Performance Report for the Period ending 31 March 2024**

It was reported that this report set out the Authority's performance against its four Well-being Objectives (Conservation, Climate, Connection and Communities) set out in its Corporate and Resources Plan 2023/24 – 2026/27. It outlined progress against priority indicators, projects, work programmes and internal development activities linked to activities identified in the Authority's Delivery Plans. The report presented the performance to date up to 31 March and included Q4 statistics for some measures. It was noted that there was a typographical error on page 127 where the figure for trees under measure NR1 related to the number of trees, rather than meters, planted.

Members congratulated officers on their work, and were pleased to note the figures on carbon emissions that were being recorded. They noted that inclusion of graphs and diagrams was helpful to understand trends.

**NOTED**

**12. Assurance Monitoring Report – Compliance, Public and Statutory Duties and Corporate Improvement**

The Performance and Compliance Officer noted that the aim of this report was to review the Authority's current performance in respect of its compliance, public and statutory duties and corporate improvement areas. It would act as one element of the risk management approach and support officers and Members in monitoring, assessing and responding to compliance and corporate improvement areas of work. The report also outlined progress against corporate improvement areas identified within the Annual Governance Statement and the Authority's Delivery Plans.

The report provided resilience scores in respect of each area, and where tolerance levels or triggers had been reached resulting in scores considered 'Vulnerable' or 'Of concern' additional information and a management response had been provided.

Planning was one area where a number of 'vulnerable' triggers were reported, and the Director acknowledged that the 8-week determination figures needed improvement and outlined the plans that were in place to do so. The figures were not helped by the large number of time-



consuming legal agreements needed to deliver affordable housing. She noted that the quality of decision making was high, demonstrated by the 100% appeal rate during the year and this justified the higher number of refusals recorded. It was noted that consultants were not currently being used for planning application or enforcement work, but that this continued to be an option if appropriate. Members were supportive of the actions being taken.

Members also asked about budgeting process and the Chief Executive confirmed that a zero-based budgeting exercise would be undertaken in the coming year, once work to identify potential budget saving had been completed. He also noted that a consultant would be working with the Authority to suggest ideas for generating income and a meeting had been arranged with him the following week.

**Noted.**

### **13. Corporate Improvement Project – Improving Management and Communication of Corporate Policies and Standards**

The Performance and Compliance Officer explained that she had identified a need for the Authority to improve its approach to management and communication of corporate policies and standards and the report set out some of the issues experienced and the opportunities for improvement that had been identified as well as the actions carried out to implement these. The report went on to outline the large number of standards and policies in place and the work that was being undertaken to review these where necessary.

Members considered that this was a helpful report in recognising the work that needed to be undertaken. It was suggested that setting review dates might help going forward and a Member questioned whether there would be prioritisation of those policies that had not been reviewed for some time. The officer replied that once policies had been migrated to the new template, a more realistic forward work programme would be created.

**NOTED.**

### **14. Exclusion of the Public**

On the proposal of Councillor Clements, seconded by Councillor Alderman, it was **RESOLVED** that the public be excluded from the meeting as exempt information, as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, would be disclosed.

### **15. Implementation of Risk Management Policy**

It was reported that following Internal Audit reports, the Authority had adopted a new approach to risk management, with a new Risk Management Policy having been agreed by the Authority in March 2024.



Following on from this, a new format for the Risk Register and a Risk Appetite Statement had been developed and were presented to the Committee.

Members were happy with the revised register which contained a smaller number of higher level risks and the process for reporting lower level risks that would be found on sub-registers was discussed.

**NOTED.**

**16. 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.

