

Governance & Audit Committee

Friday, 17 December 2021

PRESENT: Councillor T.M. Higgins (Chair);

Councillors:

A.G. Morgan, K.V. Broom, K. Davies, G.H. John, B. Thomas and D.E. Williams;

Co-opted Member:

Mrs. J. James;

Also present as an observer:

Councillor D.M. Jenkins – Cabinet Member for Resources;

The following Officers were in attendance:

C. Moore, Director of Corporate Services;

R. Mullen, Director of Environment;

N. Daniel, Head of ICT and Corporate Policy; Interim Head of Planning;

J. Fearn, Head of Property;

J. Jones, Head of Regeneration;

H. Pugh, Head of Revenues and Financial Compliance;

L.R. Jones, Head of Administration and Law;

P.R. Thomas, Assistant Chief Executive (People Management & Performance);

C. Powell, Principal Auditor;

G. Ayers, Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager;

S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator;

E. Bryer, Democratic Services Officer;

M.S. Davies, Democratic Services Officer.

Virtual Meeting: 10.00 am - 1.10 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor B.A.L. Roberts.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS

Member	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
Mrs. J. James	3- Appointment of Lay Persons to the Governance and Audit Committee	Lay Member of the Committee

3. APPOINTMENT OF LAY PERSONS TO THE GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

(NOTE: Mrs. J. James had earlier declared an interest in this item]

The Committee was informed that the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 required one third of the members of the Governance and Audit Committee to be lay persons and for a lay person to be appointed as Committee Chair. Accordingly, consideration was given to a report detailing options for the size of the committee, and recommended arrangements for the appointment of the

additional lay members to meet the Act's requirements which would come into force on the 5th May 2022.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

3.1 to note the new requirement arising from the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 for one third of the Governance and Audit Committee membership to be made of lay persons, and for the Committee to be Chaired by a lay person from May 2022;

3.2 to approve the arrangements detailed in the report for the recruitment of lay persons to meet this requirement with the shortlisting of applicants being undertaken by a three member politically balanced Panel of Governance and Audit Committee Members (1 Plaid Cymru, 1 Labour and 1 Independent) with nominations for the Panel confirmed by the relevant Political Parties and notified to the Chief Executive and Head of Democratic Services.

3.3 TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL a Governance and Audit Committee of 12 members i.e. 8 elected members (as currently) and 4 lay persons to accord with the new requirement arising from the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 for one third of the Governance and Audit Committee membership to be made of lay persons.

4. PROGRESS REPORTS

4.1. PEOPLE MANAGEMENT UPDATE REPORT

The Committee considered an update report in relation to People Management which outlined the health and well-being support being provided to staff, including support for managing mental health, and the work being done in relation to the key themes of the Authority's People Strategy. The report also provided an overview of the measures put in place to support staff during the pandemic and the plan which would be developed during 2022/23. The Assistant Chief Executive – People Management expressed disappointment over the fact that the Authority had failed to secure any Welsh Trade Union Funding (WULF) that required local Trade Union endorsement to financially supplement the good work that the Authority had achieved in the training of staff in relation to Mental Health in the Workplace. He added that this would be a matter he would be pursuing and pointed out that the Authority, from its part, had already doubled 'facility time' for trade union representatives, which was integral to discussions between the recognised Trade Unions and the Leader, Deputy Leader and Chief Executive. The Trade Unions had committed to support access to WULF money, were Facility Time to be increased, which it had.

Amongst the issues/observations raised on the report were the following:-

- It was noted that the data from the Authority's covid-live feed enabled services to be managed effectively;
- The Assistant Chief Executive – People Management, in response to a question, commented that there was now an increased focus on staff engagement and dialogue as part of the Authority's appraisal system;
- The Assistant Chief Executive – People Management referred to the ways in which job-profiles and adverts had been re-appraised in areas where it had been difficult to recruit staff and attract applications. He added that the Authority also had flexibility in terms of its pay-policy statement and market

- supplements both to attract and retain staff;
- Members agreed that the response of the trade unions to the Authority's request for a contribution towards the cost of providing additional mental health support in the workplace was disappointing.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Progress Report on People Management be received.

4.2. AUDIT WALES: REVIEW OF PLANNING SERVICE - CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Further to minute 5.1 of the meeting held on the 24th September 2021 the Committee considered a quarterly update report in response to the Audit Wales recommendations and agreed actions arising from the review of the Council's Planning Services. The report sought to provide assurance to the Governance & Audit Committee that significant progress had been made over the last seven months.

Amongst the issues/observations raised on the report were the following:-

- Members welcomed the progress being made on the recommendations and staff were thanked for their work particularly in light of the covid pandemic;
- In response to a question as to how planning enforcement would be coordinated the Committee was advised that the legislation surrounding planning enforcement was complex but programmes and systems were being reviewed to make processes and progress more sustainable;
- The Interim Head of Planning confirmed that he would be returning to his role as Head of ICT once the recently appointed Head of Place and Sustainability joined the Authority;
- The Committee was assured that NRW and Dwr Cymru were always consulted on planning applications when necessary.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to note the progress made by Carmarthenshire County Council in response to the Audit Wales recommendations.

5. INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN UPDATE 2021/22

The Committee considered a progress report on the implementation of the 2021/22 Audit Plan. It was highlighted that the cyber security risk audit would now be undertaken as part of the 2022/23 Internal Audit Plan. The Authority also had arrangements in place to check for fraudulent covid-related payments.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the 2021/22 Internal Audit Plan update report be received.

6. AUDIT WALES REPORT: REGENERATING TOWN CENTRES IN WALES

The Committee considered a report by Audit Wales entitled 'Regenerating Town Centres in Wales', which called for all levels of government to step up to help make town centres sustainable, and Carmarthenshire County Council's response to those recommendations of the report which were relevant to the Council. These specifically related to the use of existing enforcement, financial assistance and debt recovery powers, and the use of the regeneration tool produced by Audit Wales to enable local authorities to self-assess their current approaches to identify where they needed to improve their work on town-centre regeneration.

In response to a question the Head of Regeneration gave a reassurance that, mindful of any implications arising from covid which could involve staff being allocated to other duties, there were sufficient staff in place to help deliver on the recommendations relevant to the Council.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to receive the report and note Carmarthenshire County Council response to the recommendations of the national report relevant to the Council.

7. PROGRESS ON REGULATORY REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee considered a report outlining progress made on regulatory report recommendations in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Act (Wales) 2011 which required Audit Committees to follow up regulatory report recommendations.

The Wales Audit Office report on Audit Committee Effectiveness (July 2018) contained a Proposal for Improvement that arrangements should be strengthened for tracking actions taken to address recommendations in regulatory reports. The process of reporting regularly to the Audit Committee addressed this proposal.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

8. GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the proposed Forward Work Programme for the 2021/22 Audit Committee Cycle detailing the items to be presented to Committee at scheduled meetings during the forthcoming year.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

9. MINUTES OF RELEVANT GROUPS TO THE GOVERNANCE AUDIT COMMITTEE:-

9.1. RISK MANAGEMENT STEERING GROUP - 11TH NOVEMBER 2021

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the Risk Management Steering Group held on 11th November 2021, be received.

9.2. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE GROUP - 17TH SEPTEMBER 2021

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the Corporate Governance Group held on 17th September 2021, be received.

9.3. GRANTS PANEL - 7TH JUNE 2021

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the Grants Panel held on the 7th June, 2021 be received.

9.4. GRANTS PANEL - 11TH OCTOBER 2021

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the Grants Panel held on the 11th October, 2021 be received.

10. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD ON 12TH OCTOBER 2021

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 12th October, 2021 be signed as a correct record.

11. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED, pursuant to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007, that the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items as the reports contained exempt information as defined in paragraphs 12 and 13 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

12. INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT - GARREG LWYD RESIDENTIAL UNIT

Following the application of the public interest test it was **RESOLVED** pursuant to the Act referred to in minute no. 11 above not to publicise the content of the report as it contained exempt information relating to particular individuals which is likely to reveal their identity (including the Authority holding that information) (Paragraphs 12 and 13 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the Act). The public interest test in respect of this report outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information as disclosure would result in a disproportionate and unfair disclosure of personal data relating to identifiable individuals.

The Committee considered a report detailing the outcome of an Internal Audit review of Garreg Lwyd Residential Unit which had been undertaken to assess the controls and procedures in place in relation to Financial Management.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received and an update be provided at the next meeting.

13. INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT - DOMESTIC BOILER SERVICING & REMEDIAL FRAMEWORK

[DURATION OF MEETING

At 1:00 p.m. during consideration of this item, the Committee's attention was drawn to Standing Order 9 'Duration of Meeting' and the fact that the meeting had been underway for 3 hours. It was therefore

RESOLVED to suspend Standing Orders to allow the transaction of the remaining business.]

Following the application of the public interest test it was **RESOLVED** pursuant to the Act referred to in minute no. 11 above not to publicise the content of the report as it contained exempt information relating to particular individuals which is likely to reveal their identity (including the Authority holding that information) (Paragraphs 12 and 13 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the Act). The public interest test in respect of this report outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information as disclosure would result in a

disproportionate and unfair disclosure of personal data relating to identifiable individuals.

The Committee considered a report detailing the findings of an Internal Audit review of the Domestic Boiler Servicing & Remedial Framework the overall objective of which was to provide an opinion on the appropriateness of the allocation of work relating to the Domestic Boiler Servicing & Remedial Framework. This followed the receipt of correspondence from a contractor, successfully awarded a place on the Domestic Boiler Servicing & Remedial Framework, who claimed not to have received any work from Carmarthenshire County Council. The purpose of the review had been to establish whether work had been undertaken in the time period within the specification of the framework and whether work had been allocated appropriately.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received and an update be provided at the next meeting in regard to the outcome of the claim which had initiated the review.

CHAIR

DATE