

## **AUDIT & REGULATORY COMMITTEE**

**Meeting: Wednesday, 27 November 2024 at 6.30 pm in The Board Room, Pavilion Gardens, Buxton**

**Present:** Councillor O Cross (Chair)

Councillors P Bell, A Benham, J Collins, M Hall, C Payne, P Reddy and M Taylor

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N Gourlay and Mrs H Burbidge

Councillor Barrow was also in attendance

**25/13 TO RECEIVE DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST ON ANY MATTERS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE**  
(Agenda Item 2)

There were no disclosures of interest

**25/14 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**  
(Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 31 July 2024 be approved as a correct record.

**25/15 MINI REVIEW OF POLLING STATIONS**  
(Agenda Item 4)

A review of some of the polling districts and voting arrangements in the Borough of High Peak has been undertaken, and some suggested changes were set out in paragraph 7 and in the appendix to the report. Any changes will come into force for the 1 May 2025 elections.

RESOLVED:

1. That the proposals setting out changes to polling districts, polling places and polling stations as detailed at Appendix A of the report be approved; and
2. That the revised arrangements take effect from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2025.

**25/16 AUDIT FINDINGS REPORT - EXTERNAL AUDIT**  
(Agenda Item 5)

The External Auditor presented the Audit Findings Report for the year ended 31 March 2024.

At the time of drafting the report, the audit work was still in progress and the outstanding issues were set out on page 5 of the report. Subject to the satisfactory resolution of these issues, it was anticipated that an unqualified audit opinion will be issued following this meeting, and the anticipated financial statement audit report opinion will be unmodified. Work on the Council's value for money (VFM) arrangements is complete and no significant weaknesses have been identified.

Regarding the outstanding IAS19 report from the Pension Fund auditor, Members were advised that assurances have been received that it will be received well in advance of the end of February deadline. Consideration was also given to matters relating to The Springs.

The Committee thanked the Audit and Finance Teams for their work.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the satisfactory conclusion of outstanding matters as set out on page 5 of the report, the Audit Findings Report for the year ended 31 March 2024 be approved.

**25/17 INTERIM AUDITOR'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024**  
(Agenda Item 6)

The Committee considered the Interim Auditor's Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2024. Under the National Audit Office Code of Audit Practice, Auditors are required to consider whether the Council has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The summary findings around financial sustainability, governance, improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness were set out in the report and on areas of significant weaknesses had been identified.

A core element of the report is the commentary on the Council's value for money (vfm) arrangements. No significant weaknesses in arrangements had been identified, and some improvement recommendations had been made in respect of financial sustainability and governance arrangements as set out within the report.

Discussion ensued around monitoring the performance of Council controlled companies against the efficiency plan savings targets.

In response to a query around financial sustainability and the 2023/24 outturn and planned contribution to reserves, it was commented that it is expected that any opportunity to add to reserves should be taken in the current financial climate, and that the aim of the efficiency plan is to deliver our services as efficiently as possible and, where possible enable investment to be made in council services.

The External Auditors, Finance and wider teams were thanked for their support around the value for money and financial statements work.

RESOLVED:

That the Interim Auditor's Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2024 be noted.

**25/18 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2023/24**

(Agenda Item 7)

Regulation 6 (1) (a) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 requires the Council to conduct a review each financial year of the effectiveness of its system of internal control and approve an Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The statement needs to be prepared in accordance with proper practices in relation to accounts and must be approved in advance of the Council approving the statement of accounts. 'Proper practices in relation to accounts' related to those accounting practices, which are contained in a code of practice or other document which is identified for the purposes of this provision by regulations made by the Secretary of State. Such guidance is contained in the CIPFA/SOLACE framework and guidance on 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government.'

RESOLVED:

That the Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 be approved.

**25/19 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

(Agenda Item 8)

The Committee considered the draft Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024, which, together with the accompanying notes, explains how the Council spent the council tax, business rates and other sources of funding on the provision of services during the year.

Reference was made to spent and committed funds within the UK SPF, which will be reported in full to the next meeting of Economy and Growth Select Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the draft Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024 be approved, subject to the completion of outstanding work and no material changes being made.

**25/20 TREASURY MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

(Agenda Item 9)

The Committee scrutinised the Council's Treasury Management performance in 2024/25 in compliance with the Chartered Institute of Public

Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management and generally accepted good practice.

Comments were made around the risk of some investment activity and the Link Creditworthiness model.

The Chair thanked the officer for her work and presentation.

RESOLVED:

That the current Treasury Management position at the end of the first quarter 2023/24, be noted.

## **25/21 INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT**

(Agenda Item 10)

Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 requires the Council to “undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal, auditing standards or guidance.” In accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, the Audit Manager must report periodically to the Audit Committee on the internal audit activity’s performance relative to its plan.

Key findings and recommendations relating to the Expenses & Employee Vehicle Schemes audit were discussed.

RESOLVED:

That the progress information contained within the report, be noted.

## **25/22 COUNTER FRAUD AND CORRUPTION STRATEGY**

(Agenda Item 11)

Theft, fraud, corruption and bribery are all criminal offences; the council is committed to the highest standards of integrity and will not tolerate them in any form. By having an anti-fraud and anti-corruption framework in place this demonstrates the council’s zero tolerance to any form of fraudulent activity. It is therefore important that the existing framework is reviewed and updated to take into account new legislation, procedures and best practice.

The Head of Audit was requested to ensure that the strategy is easily accessible on the council’s website.

RESOLVED:

That the updated Counter Fraud & Corruption Strategy be approved.

## **25/23 WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY**

(Agenda Item 12)

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (the Act) received the Royal Assent in July 1998 and came into force on 2 July 1999. The Act gives protection to 'whistleblowers' that raise concerns about serious fraud or malpractice at their places of work against victimisation or dismissal, provided they have acted in a responsible way in dealing with their concerns. In support of this, the Council actively promotes its Whistleblowing Policy to ensure all relevant parties are aware of it and of how, and when, to use it. Ways in which the Policy is promoted to staff were set out.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Whistleblowing Policy (the Policy) attached at Appendix 1, be approved and adopted; and
2. That the activity outlined in the report, aimed at promoting the Whistleblowing Policy within High Peak Borough Council, be noted.

**25/24**

**AUDIT & REGULATORY COMMITTEE - REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS AND TERMS OF REFERENCE**

(Agenda Item 13)

In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and as part of the process of assurance, best practice suggests that an annual review of the effectiveness of the Audit & Regulatory Committee should be undertaken. At the last meeting of the Committee, the Chair was nominated to complete the CIPFA self-assessment checklist and the CIPFA assessment tool in conjunction with the Head of Audit and Executive Director (Resources), attached at appendices 1 & 2. The Committee also agreed at the last meeting to a review of the Terms of Reference against the current CIPFA guidance, and an updated version was attached at appendix 3.

It was suggested that it may be useful to work with partner audit committees such as the SMDC Audit Committee to review governance arrangements, which will be progressed via the Chairs.

Training was discussed, and an assessment has been done around training requirements which will lead into the development of a training programme. It was also suggested that additional explanation could be included within some reports to aid members' training.

The resourcing of contract management arrangements, particularly with the Council controlled companies was discussed, and further information will be included within the Local Partnership report.

RESOLVED:

1. That the completed self-assessment checklist (Appendix 1) and assessment tool (Appendix 2), be noted; and
2. That Council be recommended to approve the updated Terms of Reference for the Committee as attached at Appendix 3 to the report;

**25/25      NOMINATION OF MAYOR 2025/26**

(Agenda Item 14)

The Committee considered the selection of Mayor for the municipal year 2025/26.

RESOLVED:

That at its meeting on 12 December, Council be recommended to confirm that the Conservative Group be invited to make a nomination for the appointment of Mayor for the Municipal Year 2025/26.

**25/26      WORK PROGRAMME**

(Agenda Item 15)

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme 2024/25 be noted.

The meeting concluded at 8.20 pm

**CHAIRMAN**