

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE MEETING

Town Hall - Bridge Street, Bideford, EX39 2HS

Tuesday, 20 February 2024 - 10.00 am

PRESENT Councillor P Hackett (Chair)  
Councillors D Brenton and L Bright and K James – substituting  
for S Gibson

ALSO PRESENT S Dorey - Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring  
Officer)  
G Bryant - Finance Manager (S151 Officer)  
T Vanstone - Senior Electoral & Democratic Services  
Officer  
K Brown - Democratic Services Officer  
A Davies - Manager, Grant Thornton

Councillors C Hodson and D Smith

122. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Paul Middlemass, Devon Audit Partnership, Councillor Gubb and Councillor Gibson who Councillor James was substituting.

123. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

124. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were Part II items.

125. URGENT MATTERS BROUGHT FORWARD WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR

There were no urgent matters brought forward.

126. AUDITOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22 AND 2022/23

The Manager of Grant Thornton presented the report, the purpose of which was for Audit & Governance Committee to approve the Auditor's Annual report 2021/22 and 2022/23.

An overview of the executive summary and three main areas – Financial Sustainability, Governance and the three Es (Effectiveness, Efficiency and Economy) was provided to the group.

The Committee were invited to ask questions.

Following a comment from the Chair, the Finance Manager (S151 Officer) confirmed that against each recommendation in the report, there is a management comment to monitor and/or action the recommendation.

It was confirmed that the Member Budget Working Group is not a statutory committee however does report findings and recommendations to Full Council.

In response to a question from Councillor L Bright, the Finance Manager (S151 Officer) confirmed that the establishment of a Reserves Policy would be considered by Full Council in advance of the budget setting for 2025/26.

Councillor L Bright also queried the situation with recruiting a new Independent Member. The Head of Legal & Governance (Monitored Officer) confirmed that vacancies are routinely advertised and agreed how important an Independent Member is to the Committee.

Following comment about the report being presented to Full Council both the Chair and the Manager from Grant Thornton advised how the report is a public document and available for all to view.

In reply to a question asked by Councillor C Hodson, it was confirmed that no assistance had been received from Devon Audit Partnership in recruiting an Independent Member.

Councillor L Bright raised queries on both Standards training, DBS checks and Active Torridge.

The Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer) advised of all the different avenues to standards training that had been organised, however was open to ideas for alternate ways of conducting training to encourage more Councillors to attend.

Regarding DBS checks the Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer) advised whilst DBS checks are not mandatory and Members cannot be forced to have one, they are encouraged to do so.

In response to the query regarding Active Torridge, Councillor K James addressed the Committee and clarified that he is the Chair of the Active Torridge Board and gave a brief overview of the obligations required by Active Torridge to TDC, however he was unsure of the correct reporting procedure, therefore would find out and let Members know.

The discussion returned to that of the DBS checks, and it was debated between Members why a check may or may not be required.

The Senior Electoral & Democratic Services Officer advised he would email all Members whose DBS had expired.

The Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer) explained the DBS process, TDC's involvement and the limited action TDC would be able to take regarding any criminal convictions that were flagged.

During the debate it was acknowledged that TDC only record that a DBS check has been requested by a Councillor. The check is confidential to the Councillor and not TDC and due to GDPR the report itself cannot be published. Councillors are not obliged to reveal the contents of any DBS check.

Councillor C Hodson advised that there are multi use DBSs available which could be investigated.

It was proposed by Councillor P Hackett, seconded by Councillor D Brenton and –

Resolved:

That the auditor's annual report 2021/22 and 2022/23 be approved.

(Vote: For – unanimous)

Councillor D Brenton left the meeting.

The Chair expressed his gratitude to the Manager of Grant Thornton and his team for the report and work conducted over the years.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and closed at 10.53 am

Chair:

Date: