

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCILAUDIT & GOVERNANCE MEETINGTown Hall - Bridge Street, Bideford, EX39 2HSTuesday, 16 July 2024 - 2.00 pm

PRESENT Councillor P Hackett (Chair)

 Councillor D Brenton (Vice-Chair)

 Councillors J Gubb, S Andrews, L Bright and S Gibson

ALSO PRESENT	G Bryant	- Finance Manager (S151 Officer)
	S Hearse	- Chief Executive
	S Dorey	- Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer)
	B Hutton	- Senior Assurance Manager, Devon Audit Partnership
	J McCormick	- Deputy Manager, Devon Audit Partnership
	K Brown	- Democratic Services Officer
	K Hewlett	- Electoral and Democratic Services Officer

143. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Craig Sullivan from Bishop Fleming.

144. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 2nd April 2024 were presented.

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

Resolved:

That the minutes be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

(Vote: For 4, Abstentions 1)

145. ACTION LIST

Action 126 – Active Torridge. The Chief Executive declared an interest as a Board Member for Active Torridge and went on to answer questions relating to the council's scrutiny role of Active Torridge provision and performance.

Action 135 – Section 106 spends. The Chief Executive advised how the spend of Section 106 monies was shared with members, and informed members that Internal Overview & Scrutiny Committee had recently completed a review.

146. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members with interests were reminded to describe the nature of their interest when the item was being considered.

147. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

It was proposed by councillor Hackett, seconded by Councillor Brenton and Resolved:

That the agenda as circulated be agreed.

(Vote: For Unanimous)

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

There were no urgent matters brought forward.

149. ASSESSMENT OF GOING CONCERN STATUS

Members were advised that the purpose of the report was to consider the Section 151 Officer's assessment of the Council as a 'going concern' in light of the closure of the Statement of Accounts for 2023-24.

The Section 151 Officer went on to explain and provide context regarding the concept of 'going concern' and summarised the review process for members. Members were advised the report conclusion; that there were adequate arrangements in place for the council to meet immediate and ongoing obligations.

Members duly noted the report.

150. DRAFT STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

Members were provided with the Draft Statement of Accounts for 2023-2024 with the published agenda.

The Section 151 Officer advised that these accounts were published in line with the statutory deadline and Torridge District Council (TDC) were one of 41% of Councils who met this deadline.

It was explained that the Statement of Accounts provides detail on the financial position as of the end of March. A brief summary of the report was provided and members were advised that the audit of the accounts had started.

Members duly noted the update.

151. INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

Chair welcomed Brad Hutton, Senior Assurance Manager, and Jo McCormick, Deputy Head of Devon Audit Partnership (DAP).

Councillor Bright joined the meeting at 14:08.

The Senior Assurance Manager introduced himself and it was confirmed that he would be attending future Committee's following the retirement of Paul Middlemass.

Members were then directed to page 18 of the agenda and the Internal Audit Annual Report. The audit opinion was confirmed to be a 'reasonable assurance'. The control framework for the audit was highlighted and explained for members and more detail was provided on how the outcome of 'reasonable assurance' had been reached.

The Senior Assurance Manager highlighted page 19 of the agenda, which detailed the audits that had taken place in 2023-24 along with a breakdown of their specific assurance ratings.

Detail regarding the completion of planned audits was also noted, along with follow up work undertaken on 2022-23 audits which had returned a limited assurance opinion. The Senior Assurance Manager mentioned the Housing Options audit opinion, which was one of the reassessments, and had now moved to a 'reasonable assurance'.

The remainder of the report was summarised and the attached appendices were noted and explained before members were asked for their questions.

Members queried the Active Torridge audit findings and requested more detail on the limited assurance opinion mentioned on page 19 of the agenda. DAP agreed to follow this up with the Chair following the meeting.

Members discussed the audit opinions and the rating systems DAP have in place and queried if there was any benchmarking of these opinions, to provide context. The Deputy Head of DAP provided examples of how this was possible through the work completed with their client base within Devon. The Deputy Head of DAP was not aware of national benchmarking and advised of the complexities of this.

The Section 151 Officer went on to note the summary report and the actions from audits (pages 26-27) and advised of how this could be used to gauge risk and assurance level.

There was a discussion regarding cyber security and member training. The continued risk to the Council of an attack were highlighted for members, along with the potential outcomes given the Council's reliance on IT infrastructure for the day to day running of council business.

The Chief Executive responded to discussion on training for members and it was suggested that Group Leaders could reinforce the importance of training within their groups.

Member's thanked DAP officers for their report and mentioned some of the positive outcomes noted in the report.

Discussion continued in relation to member training, and how to make this more accessible for members. There was also discussion on the issue of recruitment and how this appears to be a theme within the report.

The Deputy Head of DAP explained these 2 areas were key risks on most Local Authority risk registers. It was suggested that some benchmarking on cyber security training across other Local Authorities could be brought to the following meeting for members.

In response the Chief Executive highlighted there was a Corporate Peer Challenge recommendation to set up a Member Development Working Group and this would be led by Group Leaders and the Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive also provided a brief update on recruitment, and work taking place to update HR policies at TDC.

Members duly noted the report.

152. CHANGES TO THE CONTRACT PROCEDURAL RULES

The Section 151 Officer explained the purpose of the report was to agree changes to the Council's Contract Procedure Rules following the approval of the Social Value Policy. Along with an amendment of the Contract Procedure Rules regarding Waivers.

Members were provided with background and were advised why the changes were being implemented. Members were also reminded that a rewrite would be required at the end of the year due to legislative change.

It was proposed by Councillor Hackett, seconded by Councillor Brenton and Resolved:

That Members recommend to Full Council the changes to the Contract Procedure Rules as referenced in this report.

(Vote: For Unanimous)

153. FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan was not attached to the agenda so it was agreed that this would be shared with the chair following the meeting.

154. RISK REGISTER

The Section 151 Officer introduced the item and explained that, following the advice on Internal and External Auditors, the Risk Register would now also be discussed as a Part I item.

The risk register was then reviewed with members.

155. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

It was proposed by Councillor Hackett, seconded by Councillor Brenton and – Resolved:

That the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting because of the likely disclosure of exempt information by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part I and paragraph 10 of Part 2 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

(Vote: For Unanimous)

156. PART II (CLOSED SESSION)

157. RISK REGISTER

Members noted the Risk Register.

It was proposed by Councillor Hackett, seconded by Councillor Brenton and Resolved:

That the meeting come out of Part II and close.

(Vote: For Unanimous)

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and closed at 2.37 pm

Chair:

Date: