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Audit Committee

Wednesday, 15 November 2023

Present: M Wilkinson (Chair)
Councillors L Bones, D Cox, L Marshall, T Mulvenna,
T Neira and J O'Shea

Apologies: Councillor A Spowart and Dr S Green

AC/26/23 Appointment of Substitute Members

There were no Substitutes reported

AC/27/23 Declarations of Interest and Notification of any Dispensations Granted

There were no declarations of interest of dispensations reported.

AC/28/22 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

AC/29/23 Carbon Net-Zero 2030 Corporate Risk

Consideration was given to a report which provided an update on the approach taken to manage the Carbon Net Zero 2030 corporate risk.

It was explained that the Authority has an Action Plan which contained over 150 actions across 10 key workstreams which would help to significantly reduce carbon emissions. The Plan was overseen by the Carbon Net Zero 2030 Board co-chaired by the Director of Environment and the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and was made up of senior managers and officer along with

representatives of the finance team. The Board met on a monthly basis to review key progress against the action plan.

It was noted that the Authority's carbon footprint made up less than 2% of the Borough's carbon footprint and therefore public sector organisations and large private businesses had been invited to participate in a board to tackle borough wide carbon emissions. It was also noted that the delivery of the Carbon Net Zero 2030 Action Plan had been included in the Internal Audit plan for 2022/23.

Reference was made the systems in place to react to any changes in Government guidance in respect of the climate.

Resolved that the approach to managing the risk be noted.

AC/30/23 Pandemic Flu - Corporate Risk

Consideration was given to a report which set out the plans and processes in place to respond to an influenza pandemic. It was explained that pandemic flu was one of the most severe natural challenges likely to affect the United Kingdom and was included on the National Risk Register 2023 published by the Government. The UK Health Security Agency had a key role in planning for and responding to pandemics. Alongside this was a community health response which included the involvement of the Integrated Care Board and NHS England.

Locally the Northumberland Local Resilience Forum Community Risk Register 2021-23 included a section on pandemic flu. The Authority had also used government guidance in formulating its plan for pandemic flu.

It was explained that there were a number of arrangements in place to deal with pandemic flu which included:

- The Local Planning Leadership Group arrangements chaired by the Director of Public Health;
- The local Pandemic Flu Plan which set out the national response framework and the Authority's statutory responsibilities and had recently been refreshed;

- Business continuity plans for all services of the Authority;
- Partnership working with the Local Resilience Forum;
- Regular updates provided to the Elected Mayor, elected members and Local Members of Parliament.

Resolved that the approach to managing the pandemic flu risk be noted

AC/31/23 Exclusion Resolution

Resolved that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and having applied a public interest test as defined in part 2 of Schedule 12A of the Act, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

AC/32/23 Strategic Audit Plan 2023-24 – Interim Monitoring Statement

Consideration was given to a report which provided a half yearly update on the Strategic Audit Plan 2023/24. Members sought and received clarification in relation to several items in the report.

Resolved that the progress set out in the monitoring statement and the planned levels of coverage achieved by Internal Audit at this stage of the year be noted.

AC/33/23 Key Outcomes from Internal Audit Work undertaken between May and November 2023

Consideration was given to a report which set out the key outcomes from internal audit reports issued between May and November 2023 to enable the Committee to maintain an oversight of the emerging risks and governance issues as they arose during the year.

It was explained that there had been eleven reports finalised within the reporting period, four of the reports had been given a significant assurance rating, six had received a limited assurance rating. For each of the reports a level of assurance had been identified and a series of recommendations made, examples of good practice identified and where appropriate the progress made by management in relation to the issues identified had been outlined.

Members sought and received clarification on a number of items in the report.

Resolved that the key findings, good practice identified and the management response to the internal audit reports issued between May and November 2023 be noted.

AC/34/23 Corporate Risk Management Summary Report

Consideration was given to a report which outlined the corporate risks that had been identified for monitoring and management by the Authority's Senior Leadership Team as of 6 September 2023. The report provided detailed information on each of the corporate risks, including the cause of the risk, the consequences if the risk were to materialise together with the controls in place to address those risks.

It was explained that the risk register had been updated prior to consideration by the Senior Leadership Team and the Cabinet on 16 November 2023. Following a reorganisation of Adults and Children's Services the Social Care Demand and Performance Risk had been replaced by two service specific risks, one for Adults Social Care and the second for Children's Services.

Clarification was sought by Members in relation to specific elements of the risk register.

Resolved that the review of the key corporate risks undertaken by the Senior Leadership Team and endorsed by Cabinet as part of the Authority's risk management arrangements be noted.