

Chairman's Annual Report – 2020/21 Audit Committee

When I saw that the agenda was so large this evening, I dutifully offered to leave off The Chairman's Report, but Sarah was not having any of it. And on the subject of the Committee's Clerk, I would like to personally thank Sarah Lees for the invaluable assistance she has provided me since I became Chairman.

It would be fair to say that this has been an incredibly testing and difficult year due to the pandemic but everyone both Members and Officers have worked extremely hard to ensure things continued to run smoothly.

2nd June 2020

The first meeting of the Committee saw Cllr Bob Evans elected as Chair and Cllr Andy Wyer elected as Vice Chair.

Business got underway with the noting of the first Performance and Risk report since Covid lockdown, giving a final outrun position for 2019/2020. The Internal Audit Annual Report for 2019/2020, Grant Thornton's update due to Covid and the Chairman's report were also noted.

It was resolved that the revised Risk and Opportunity Management Policy be approved, as was the Internal Audit Plan for 2019/2020.

It was agreed to continue meetings on Tuesday evenings at 1730 hours. Under items for the next meeting, the committee requested that they receive the report going to cabinet on 11th June regarding 3RDL.

23rd June 2020

Special Meeting - 3 Rivers Development Ltd

It was requested by the Cabinet that the committee review the reports and recommendations/actions presented to them on the 11th June and provide feedback.

During Public Question Time, a member of the public asked a question about public exclusion and part II discussions. Another question was presented by Cllr Wilce. Answers were provided by the Deputy Chief Executive after the meeting and these were posted on the website for all to see.

During the 3RDL Governance Review discussion, the Committee agreed to go into Part II. The Committee made a number of recommendations which would be put before the Cabinet.

11 August 2020

During Public Question Time, a member of the public asked why the Committee went into Part II at the previous meeting, given that Grant Thornton discussed the recommendations in the open. He also asked if the Committee would be asking for actions to be taken in light of the £600,000 loss. The Chairman responded by explaining that the use of Part II was consistent across the Council and the Committee made the decision to hear the report in Part II due to the confidential information it contained. It was further explained that the financial loss and the consideration of it was confidential.

The Chairman gave an update on the Devon Audit Partnership.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change attended the meeting and gave a short talk on how the Councils could make changes.

A report from the Corporate Manager for Revenues and Benefits, regarding Covid 19 grants was noted, as was, Performance and Risk, Grant Thornton Audit Findings 2019/2020, and a letter of representation to Grant Thornton.

It was resolved to approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2019/2020 and Corporate Governance Framework. Likewise the Annual Report and Accounts for 2019/2020.

Items for the next meeting included, Consideration of a Housing Infrastructure Fund as recommended by the Scrutiny Committee and to consider the risks in relation to 'phishing emails' with the outlook email system.

22nd September 2020

After changes at Cabinet, Cllr Bob Evans stood down as Chairman to take on another role and you then elected me to take his place for which I thank you. I would also like to thank Bob for his work with this Committee in the past and his continued assistance to me, answering my many questions on taking over.

During Chairman's Announcements, the Chairman read out a response from the Chief Executive regarding a question raised at the previous meeting. This was with regard to 3 Rivers Development Ltd.

A report from the Head of Planning with regard to the Housing Infrastructure Fund was duly noted, as were reports from Performance and Risk, the Progress Update on the Annual Governance Statement Action Plan, Internal Audit Assurance Options, Internal Audit Progress Report and the External Audit Progress Report and Sector Update.

17th November 2020

During Public Question Time, the Chairman accepted two questions from Cllr Barnell with regard to 3 Rivers Development Ltd.

How would the Committee exercise its responsibilities in future in respect of the ongoing risks associated with 3 Rivers Development Ltd?

What will the roles of both the internal and external auditors in ensuring that any risks associated with the councils investments in and loans to 3RDL are effectively analysed and reported to the Committee?

The chairman responded, explaining a report would be going to the December Cabinet meeting and full answers would be provided to members in due course.

It was agreed that the Vice Chair would deputise for the Chairman at Devon Audit Partnership meetings if given enough advance warning.

The Committee recommended to Cabinet that the draft Key Performance Indicators be approved under the Performance and Risk section.

Progress Update on the Annual Governance Statement Action Plan, a briefing paper on the Redmond Review, the Internal Audit Progress Report and the External Audit Progress Report and Sector update were all noted by the Committee.

26th January 2021

During Public Question Time, a member of the public asked, Did the joint working group meeting of Scrutiny and Audit take place and if so, will the Chairman please report to the public, the outcomes from the discussions at that meeting?

The Chairman responded at the time with 'Yes' then provided a fuller response during Chairman's Announcements, whereby he stated that 15 members attended. Presentations were made and the opportunity for questions to be asked and the roles of Scrutiny and Audit were clarified.

Cllr Alex White volunteered as the second representative from the Committee but only whilst his workload allowed during lockdown.

The Committee recommended that the Corporate Recovery Policy be approved. It also approved the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy but asked for Strategy to come back to the next meeting for further consideration.

The Committee heard a report on Grants and Local restrictions provided by the Corporate Manager of Revenues, Benefits and Recovery.

Reports from Performance and Risk, Annual Governance Statement Action Plan update, Internal Audit Progress Report, Annual Audit Letter from Grant Thornton and the External Audit Progress Report and Sector update were all noted.

Although I made mention earlier, I would like to thank the Members of the Audit Committee, the Officers who carry out their roles in the administration of this Committee or by providing regular reports to it and also the external agencies who also support us.

Cllr Stuart Penny
Chairman of the Audit Committee