

SWT Audit, Governance and Standards Committee - 11 November 2019

Present: Councillors Lee Baker, Simon Coles, Dixie Darch, Hugh Davies, Caroline Ellis, Janet Lloyd, Steven Pugsley, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Sarah Wakefield, Mrs Anne Elder and Bryn Wilson

Emily Collacott, Geri Daly, Paul Fitzgerald and Clare Rendell

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

43. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors S Buller and T Venner.

44. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee

(Minutes of the meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee held on 25 September 2019 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee held on 25 September 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

45. Declarations of Interest

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor or Clerk of a County, Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr L Baker	All Items	Cheddon Fitzpaine & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Davies	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Ellis	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	None
Cllr V Stock-Williams	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Councillor L Baker further declared a personal interest as an employee of Lloyds Banking Group.

46. **Public Participation**

No members of the public had requested to speak on any item on the agenda.

47. **Grant Thornton External Audit - Audit Findings Report**

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- The External Auditor advised that the objection was still ongoing but that it had not impacted on the formal opinion given on the Statement of Accounts.
- Councillors requested clarification on the term 'recharge'.
- Councillors queried whether the figures quoted for redundancies included the officers who had worked at the Depot.
Yes they did.
- Councillors requested clarification on the objection and whether the response would be published.
The External Auditor confirmed that the response was shared between the Auditor and the Objector and that the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee would not normally get sight of it. However, dependant on the results, some of the outcomes might lead to public actions.
- Councillors queried if the Objector was not satisfied with the outcome, could they take their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman?
Yes they could.
- Councillors queried the section in the report on Land Valuation.
The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy code required assets to be valued every five years. However the External Auditors recommended carrying out valuations more frequently.
- Councillors queried the timescale for the objection.
The External Auditor advised there was a lot of work to be undertaken but hoped it would not take too long, however, could not give a completion date at this point.
- Councillors queried what costings would have an impact on the audit opinion.
The arrangements for 2018/19 were adequate and they would be monitored and if found to be out of proportion, Councillors would be kept up to date.
- Councillors queried whether they received updates on the budget.
The Section 151 Officer confirmed that both the Scrutiny and Audit, Governance and Standards Committees received updates. The budget was also reported to the Senior Management Team on a regular basis.
- Councillors queried whether the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee were able to have sight of the accounts to conduct their own checks.
The Council operated a system known as reporting by exception. An explanation on the process was given to the Committee.
- Councillors queried why 2017 was an expensive audit year.

The External Auditor advised that it was the final year of the old contract for both Councils and that firms had to re-tender for the new contract. The PSAA were responsible for setting the fees.

Resolved that the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee noted:-

- 1) The Audit Findings Report in respect of TDBC's Statement of Accounts 2018/19; and
- 2) The Auditor's Opinion in relation to the Statement of Accounts and Value for Money Conclusion.

48. **Approval of Taunton Deane Borough Council Statement of Accounts**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Section 151 Officer thanked the External Auditor for their work and opinion on the Statement of Accounts.
- Concern was raised on the objection submitted by a member of the public and the extra cost to the Council.
The External Auditor advised that there would be an additional charge and that it would be agreed by the Public Sector Audit Appointments.
- Councillors queried the Non Domestic Rates appeal submitted by the NHS.
Officers advised that the legal process was still ongoing and that they had to apply an element of judgement, but had set money aside for that. Clarification was given on contingent liability and probable liability.
- The Section 151 Officer requested approval from the Committee that the Vice-Chair signed the Statement of Accounts in the absence of the Chair, which was unanimously agreed.

Resolved that the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee:-

- 1) Noted the Auditor's unqualified opinion on the Statement of Accounts;
- 2) Approved the 2018/19 Statement of Accounts as attached to the report;
- 3) Endorsed the Vice-Chair (in the Chair) of the Committee signed the Statement of Accounts; and
- 4) Endorsed the Vice-Chair (in the Chair) of the Committee signed the management letter of representation in respect of the financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2019.

(The Meeting ended at 7.30 pm)