

Audit & Governance Committee

Date of Meeting: 27 May 2021

Report Title: Committee Work Plan

Senior Officer: David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. This report presents the Work Plan for 2021/22 (Appendix A) to the Committee for comment and approval.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the Committee:
- 2.1.1. Consider the Work Plan and determine any required amendments;
 - 2.1.2. Note that the plan will be brought back to the Committee throughout the year for further development and approval.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1. The Audit and Governance Committee has a key role in overseeing and assessing the Council's risk management, control and corporate governance arrangements. It advises the Council on the adequacy and effectiveness of these arrangements. A forward-looking programme of meetings and agenda items is necessary to enable the Committee to fulfil its responsibilities.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. Not applicable

5. Background

- 5.1. In March 2021 the Audit and Governance Committee approved the draft Work Plan for 2021/22. The Work Plan presented in Appendix A to this report is broadly similar to that report, with the inclusion of two additional items on today's agenda regarding the recruitment of co-opted members, and appointments to a hearing sub-committee.

- 5.2. Aspects of the Audit and Governance Committee's agenda are determined by statutory requirements such as the Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement. As set out in the report to March Committee, following the publication of the Redmond Review, MHCLG have confirmed that subject to consultation in the new year, the department intends to amend regulations to extend the deadline for publishing audited local authority accounts from 31 July to 30 September, for a period of two years (i.e. covering the audit of the 2020/21 and 2021/22 accounting years). At the end of this period they will review whether there is a continued need to have an extended deadline.
- 5.3. In recognition of current capacity and resource demands the publication of Cheshire East Council's audited accounts for 2020/21 are likely to be available for the Committee to approve at the end of November 2021. This is in-line with the process for the 2019/20 accounts. Discussion has taken place with the Council's External Auditors, who have agreed this is also the most appropriate approach in 2021. This date is reflected in the Council's work plan. Deadlines will be reviewed for the 2021/22 accounts in line with any new guidance.
- 5.4. Outside these agenda items, the Committee should aim to manage its agenda according to its assurance needs to fulfil its terms of reference. The Committee is asked to consider the contents of the Work Plan (Appendix A) and establish any amendments that will enable it to meet its responsibilities.
- 5.5. By identifying the key topics to be considered at the Audit and Governance Committee meetings, and receiving appropriate reports, Committee Members are able to undertake their duties effectively and deliver them to a high standard. In turn, this adds to the robustness of the risk management framework, the adequacy of the internal control environment and the integrity of the financial reporting and corporate governance of the Council.
- 5.6. Members will recognise that some items are brought to Committee on a more regular basis than others to ensure that statutory requirements are complied with. There are also individual requirements of the Committee's Terms of Reference which are only used on an ad-hoc basis. The Work Plan will be re-submitted to the Committee for further development and approval at each subsequent meeting.
- 5.7. In order to help with their deliberations, Members are asked to consider the following:
- 5.7.1. care should be taken to avoid duplication and maintain the focus of an audit committee on its core functions as defined by its terms of

reference rather than wider issues that are subject to the work of other committees or assurance functions.

- 5.7.2. that the Audit and Governance Committee should operate at a strategic level with matters of operational detail resolved by service managers.
- 5.7.3. the number and frequency of reports should be proportional to the risk in order to give the core business of an audit committee sufficient focus and attention and to avoid lengthy and thus unproductive meetings.

6. Implications of the Recommendations

6.1. Legal Implications

- 6.1.1. The Work Plan for 2021/22 complies with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The Committee is advised that for the publication of the 2020/21 accounts, an approach has been agreed with the Council's external auditors to manage risks recognised around capacity and resource.

6.2. Finance Implications

- 6.2.1. When reviewing the Work Plan, Members will need to consider the resource implications of any reviews they wish to carry out both in terms of direct costs and in terms of the required officer support.

6.3. Policy Implications

- 6.3.1. There are no policy implications in this report.

6.4. Equality Implications

- 6.4.1. There are no direct implications for equality in this report. The Audit and Governance Committee receives assurances from across the organisation.

6.5. Human Resources Implications

- 6.5.1. Members should be satisfied that the inclusion of each item on its agenda results in added value, as the assurance process has a resource implication to the organisation and should therefore be proportional to the risk.

6.6. Risk Management Implications

- 6.6.1. Effective internal control and the establishment of an audit committee can never eliminate the risks of serious fraud, misconduct or misrepresentation of the financial position.

However, an effective audit committee can:

- 6.6.1.1. raise awareness of the need for robust risk management, control and corporate governance arrangements and the implementation of audit recommendations,
- 6.6.1.2. increase public confidence in the objectivity and fairness of financial and other reporting
- 6.6.1.3. reinforce the importance and independence of internal and external audit and any other similar review process
- 6.6.1.4. provide additional assurance through a process of independent and objective review

6.7. Rural Communities Implications

- 6.7.1. There are no direct implications for rural communities.

6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

- 6.8.1. There are no direct implications for children and young people.

6.9. Public Health Implications

- 6.9.1. There are no direct implications for public health.

6.10. Climate Change Implications

- 6.10.1. There are no climate change implications in this report.

7. Ward Members Affected

- 7.1. All wards affected.

8. Consultation & Engagement

- 8.1. The Work Plan is prepared following discussion with key officers who regularly provide updates to the Audit and Governance Committee. The Work Plan for 2021/22 was also been discussed with the Committee Chair and Vice Chair and considered by the Corporate Leadership Team.

9. Contact Information

- 9.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officers:

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