

# ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

**27 SEPTEMBER 2023**

## PRESENT

Councillors: Brotherton (Chair), Lloyd (Vice-Chair), Axford, Baskerville, Brophy, Carter, Cordingley, Welton.

### In attendance

Jeannie Platt	Independent Member
Dylan Butt	Councillor
Alastair Newall	External Auditor, Mazars
Graeme Bentley	Director of Finance and Systems
Dave Muggeridge	Head of Financial Management
Mark Foster	Audit and Assurance Manager
David Wright	Counter Fraud Manager
Sarah Butters	Head of Education Places, Access & Vulnerable Children
Alex Murray	Governance Officer
Stephanie Ferraioli	Governance Officer

## 1. ATTENDANCES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Jerrome and Whetton.

## 2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest to be recorded.

## 3. MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2023 are a true and correct record.

## 4. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

No questions from members of the public were received for this meeting.

## **5. STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER – DEMAND FOR SCHOOL PLACES**

Following a request from Members for an update on strategic risk in respect of the demand for school places in the borough, a presentation was provided by the Head of Education, Access and Vulnerable Children. The Committee were informed that in 2021 there had been an increase of over 73% in demand for grammar school places which was due to a number of reasons, mainly the increase of the diverse population and the popularity of the borough. The Committee was provided with details of a range of measures being taken or planned to increase places available.

It was noted the home to school transport budget funds a small proportion of passes for children but there are challenges as the demand for SEN places has increased. When looking at school expansion, school accommodation planning needs to be taken into consideration which also presents a variety of challenges.

It was suggested that spaces from Primary Schools be used to mitigate the increased demand given the baby boom cycle has moved to the Secondary School now and that in areas such as Altrincham and Stretford the birth rate is falling.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

## **6. COUNTER FRAUD AND ENFORCEMENT TEAM UPDATE REPORT**

The Counter Fraud and Enforcement Manager presented a report which outlined details of the Counter Fraud team's activity in 2022/23 to support the detection and investigation of fraud. It was noted that some work had been informed by the council tax single person discount review which had been recently concluded.

He informed that from 1 July 2023, the Counter Fraud team has transferred from Exchequer Services to the Audit and Assurance Service and staff will work closely with Internal Audit colleagues to share expertise in aiming to combat fraud.

The cost of employing the recovery team was queried and it was stated that the team had been set up 8 years ago and based on performance, it costed less than what it was actually recovering therefore a very effective use of resources.

RESOLVED – That the report update be noted.

## **7. 2021/22 AUDIT COMPLETION REPORT**

The Chair welcomed the new Auditor from Mazars, Mr Alastair Newall, who introduced the 2021/22 Audit Completion report stating that the audit is now almost complete directing the Committee to section 2 of the report which highlights the outstanding areas that have now progressed satisfactorily.

He informed that for local authorities, work on valuing Council's estates is a complex one even with support from external valuers however MAZARS are comfortable with the end position they have got to for Trafford Council.

Members were reassured that the audit report was being finalised and that it served where applicable to highlight any areas of significant risk.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That a further update be provided at the meeting in November.
- 2) That the update be noted.

## **8. 2021/22 ACCOUNTS**

The Head of Financial Management presented the report on the 2021/22 Accounts which in the next couple of days will receive delegated authority for sign off.

RESOLVED – That the update on Accounts 2021/22 be noted.

## **9. 2022/23 FINAL ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT**

The Committee was informed that there was no further update to the Annual Governance Statement that had previously been shared at the previous Committee meeting for feedback. Clarification on the timeline for issuing the final document will be obtained further to the completion of the accounts audit.

RESOLVED – That subject to the completion of the 2022/23 audit and approval of the final statement of Accounts by the Accounts and Audit Committee, the 2022/23 AGS will be signed off and issued.

## **10. UNDERSTANDING THE PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS**

The Director of Finance and Systems made a presentation to the Committee on the reason for the prudential code, the key indicators and benchmark information comparing the Council with other local authorities on both the level of debt and debt servicing costs. The presentation also provided an indication of areas that the Committee should look at when receiving and reviewing future reports on the subject.

Members were very appreciative of the presentation and found the information very helpful, particularly the benchmarking data against other authorities now facing financial difficulties.

They requested a TEAMS meeting to be able to explore the matter further and to serve as a training session to understand borrowing.

RESOLVED – That the training be rolled out more widely for the benefit of Members.

## **11. 2022/23 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL PERFORMANCE**

The Director of Finance and Systems presented a report on treasury management performance for 2022/23. This detailed the position on the level of long-term debt and investment activity over the year. The report also confirmed that the Council had complied with all the Prudential Indicators.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

## **12. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2023/24 PERIOD 4**

The Director of Finance and Systems informed the Committee that the Budget Monitoring Report was presented to Executive two weeks ago. The report showed a projected budget overspend of £1.7m; the position being mitigated by some new grant income.

A number of questions were raised by the Committee which the Director of Finance and Systems responded to.

RESOLVED - That the report be noted.

## **13. 2023/24 AUDIT AND ASSURANCE SERVICE UPDATE REPORT – APRIL TO JUNE 2023**

The Committee were presented with a summary of audits recently undertaken. Attention was drawn to Section 5 where a list of audits and findings can be found. This included two follow-up audits where progress has been reviewed in addressing previous audit recommendations. Findings highlighted that improvements have been made covering all the previous recommendations.

The response from management and clients in respect of the work carried out by the Finance team has been very positive. A full analysis will be available later in the year when more feedback will have been received.

RESOLVED – That the service update for the period April to June 2023 be noted.

#### **14. ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24**

The Assurance and Audit Manager informed that the programme had been slightly updated since the last meeting in March 2023 and that Star Procurement have been invited to give an update at next meeting.

RESOLVED – That the update to the Work Programme for the  
Accounts and Audit Committee 2023/24 be noted.

#### **15. URGENT BUSINESS (IF ANY)**

There was no urgent business to be discussed at this meeting.

Meeting ends 9.30 pm.