

Minutes of Accounts and Audit

Meeting Date: Wednesday, 22 November 2023, starting at 6.30 pm
Present: Councillor R Walsh (Chair)

Councillors:

T Austin	L Street
S Fletcher	C McFall
J Hill	K Barnsley
R Newmark	M Graveston
G McCrum	

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Financial Services, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Sophia Iqbal and Georgia Jones (Grant Thornton)

497 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received for the meeting from Councillor S Hirst.

498 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

499 DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY, OTHER REGISTRABLE AND NON REGISTRABLE INTERESTS

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary, other registrable or non-registrable interests.

500 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

501 UPDATED AUDIT FINDINGS REPORT 2022/23

Georgia Jones, Key Audit Partner submitted a report on behalf of Grant Thornton which provided Members with an update as to their audit findings for Ribble Valley Borough Council. It was noted that their work was almost complete, with just a few matters outstanding, namely:

- Completion of their work on pensions, with them yet to receive the letter of assurance from Lancashire Pension Fund
- Waiting for receipt of the management representation letter.
- A review of the final set of financial statements.

Members were advised that the anticipated financial statements audit report opinion would be unqualified.

It was noted that the auditors had made two key recommendations in respect of the Value for Money work and that there are ongoing discussions with Officers in relation to this and there will be a more detailed report on this brought to the next Committee.

502

PSAA AUDIT SCALE FEE PROPOSALS FOR 2023/24

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted an information report advising Committee that the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) had released details of the proposed scale fees for external audit work in respect of 2023/24. It was noted that the proposals saw the audit fees for the Council increasing from an equivalent fee of £50,832 to £127,588.

The Head of Financial Services outlined the background and reminded Members that the process for appointments for an external auditor began in February 2022. On 8 March 2022 Full Council had approved the recommendation for RVBC to opt into the sector led option for the appointment of external auditors to principal local government and police bodies for five financial years from 1 April 2023.

Concerns were raised as to level of the proposed increases and questions were asked as to whether any penalties would be incurred if the Council were to opt out of the sector led option.

The Head of Financial Services reminded Members that it had previously been highlighted to Committee on 22 November 2022 that the scale fees for 2023/24 would increase by approximately 150%. The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive outlined the changes that have occurred over the last 10-15 years with regards to the external audit sector including the abolishment of the Audit Commission, procurement of auditors, reforms to local audit, level of scale fees, pressures in the local audit market and delays due to shortage of auditors and the increased requirements of the Financial Reporting Council (FRC). It was further confirmed that the change in scale fees had been accounted for and was already included within the Council's budget.

Georgia Jones also outlined that the audit work that they undertake is of a specialist nature and they ensure that a thorough and comprehensive audit is carried out. The audit regime has changed substantially over the last five years and the demand on auditors by regulators has increased exponentially.

503

INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report providing an update to Committee in respect of progress made in delivery against 2023/24 Internal Audit Plan. It provided a summary of internal audit activity covering the period September 2023 to October 2023.

Key focuses since the last Committee were noted to be the Changing Places grant claim and Treasury Management.

It was noted that a Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) self-assessment was undertaken by the Internal Audit Manger throughout October 2023 and one recommendation was made. As this recommendation will enhance practice and does not currently impact compliance with PSIAS and the CIPFA Local Government Application Note, it is now considered that the Internal Audit Service conforms with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing based on the self-assessment.

504

STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report detailing the strategic risk management activity that had taken place between April and October 2023.

It was noted that it contains 16 open risks as at October 2023 which affect the delivery of the Corporate Strategy.

The Internal Audit Manager advised that each risk has, not only been assigned individual risk owners, but also an appropriate service committee who can challenge decisions made by officers. These committees would then provide assurances to this Committee over the management of risks and priorities.

505

REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports from representatives on outside bodies.

506

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items under this heading.

The meeting closed at 7.06 pm

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact the committee clerk, Jenny Martin 01200 414408 jenny.martin@ribblevalley.gov.uk.