

Report to Audit Committee

Agenda
Item:

A.3

Meeting Date: 15 March 2021
Portfolio: Finance, Governance and Resources
Key Decision: Not applicable
Within Policy and Budget Framework: Yes
Public / Private: Public

Title: AUDIT COMMITTEE'S ANNUAL REPORT
Report of: Chair of Audit Committee.
Report Number: RD62/20

Purpose / Summary:

This report provides a summary of the work undertaken by the Audit Committee during 2020/21.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Audit Committee note and accept this report for recommendation to Council.

Tracking

Executive:	Not applicable
Overview and Scrutiny:	Not applicable
Council:	27th April 2021

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

1. **BACKGROUND**

In accordance with paragraph 3.3 of the Audit Committee's Rules of Governance - attached to this report for Members' information as **Appendix A** - the Chair of the Audit Committee is required to present an Annual Report on the work of the Audit Committee to the full Council.

2. **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

2.1 This report summarises the work carried out by the Audit Committee during 2020/21. It demonstrates to Council and stakeholders the effectiveness of the Committee in maintaining the organisation's internal control environment and governance arrangements.

2.2 The Committee

2.2.1 The Members of the Audit Committee for this municipal year are -

Conservative	Labour	Independent
Cllr Meller (Chair)	Cllr Ms Patrick (vice chair)	Cllr Bomford
Cllr Mrs Bowman	Cllr Birks	Cllr Paton (Sub)
Cllr Mrs McKerrell	Cllr Dr Tickner	
Cllr Mrs Finlayson (sub)	Cllr Alcroft (Sub)	
Cllr Morton (sub)	Cllr Miss Whalen (Sub)	
Cllr Shepherd (sub)	Cllr Atkinson (Sub)	

2.2.2 This Report covers the meetings of the Audit Committee held on:

30th July 2020

24th September 2020

18th December 2020

15th March 2021

Details of the agenda items covered at each meeting are given at **Appendix B**.

2.2.3 The External and Internal Auditors, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and Resources, the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources, the Corporate Director of Governance & Regulatory Services and the Designated Head of Internal Audit are invited to all Committee meetings. The Committee can seek attendance from any officer or Member of the Executive and has exercised this right on several occasions.

2.2.4 The 2020/21 Audit Committee schedule was impacted by the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic with all meetings held virtually via Microsoft Teams. The work of the committee was curtailed in March 2020 when the Committee scheduled for 16 March was cancelled. The items scheduled for this meeting were therefore considered at the meeting of 30th July.

2.2.5 The use of Microsoft Teams for holding Audit Committee meetings virtually has functioned extremely well with the Committee able to receive all reports and consider, debate and make resolutions virtually.

2.2.6 At each meeting the Committee receives, for information purposes, the minutes of the Business and Transformation Scrutiny panel.

2.2.7 Training is an essential element for an Audit Committee. The Committee usually receive annual training and are updated on statutory accounting requirements and are alert to the possibility of areas in which their knowledge could be extended. The Committee also use the pre-meeting briefing sessions for planned training; however, due to the Coronavirus pandemic it has not been possible to undertake the normal schedule of training during 2020/21.

2.2.8 During the year Members and Substitutes of the Committee were invited to attend an Effectiveness Review workshop. This took place in October 2020 following the completion of a CIPFA Good Practice Survey by attendees; the results of which being the focus of the session. It was agreed that the CIPFA Skills and Knowledge Framework be used to inform a new training programme for Audit Committee Members for 2021/22, and details of the framework has been issued to all Audit Committee Members and Substitutes - a further workshop may be required to analysis the results of this new survey, once completed.

2.3 External Audit

2.3.1 The Audit Committee received and approved the external auditor's Annual Audit Plan. It commented on the fee rates and work programme consultation carried out by Grant Thornton based on fees set by Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd, the independent company set up by the Local Government Association with delegated statutory functions to set audit fees and make arrangements for certain audits.

2.3.2 The Audit Committee also received the draft Annual Findings Report in relation to the Statement of Accounts, however, it was not possible for the Committee to receive the final version, nor sign off the 2019/20 Statement of Accounts due to

ongoing work to ensure the Statements are finalised . A judgement was included in the Annual Governance Report indicating whether the Council has adequate arrangements to secure Value for Money in the use of resources. The Annual Audit Letter was not received due to the ongoing work to complete the Statement of Accounts.

2.3.3 Finally, the External Auditor also provided the Committee with informative updates on key areas of interest in Local Government which were well received by the Committee and which the Committee referred on to other groups who may find them useful, e.g. Executive or Council.

2.3.4 The proposed external audit fee for 2020/21 was £51,033, however, this actual fee is likely to rise as additional work has had to be undertaken in relation to the Statement of Accounts and as yet this has not been quantified.

2.4 Internal Audit

2.4.1 The Committee has overseen the work undertaken by Internal Audit throughout the year, including the delivery of the Annual Audit Plan.

2.4.2 Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Committee only approved the Internal Audit Plan at its first scheduled meeting of the year in July 2020. This set out the individual audit review areas to be carried out. The Internal Audit Plan focused on a Risk Based approach to establishing which reviews to undertake and where resources should be focussed.

2.4.3 The Committee received quarterly update reports from Internal Audit highlighting performance against the plan as well as reports of completed reviews. Each report is supplemented by a verbal update on key areas of success or concern in each completed audit review from the Designated Head of Internal Audit and the Principal Auditor.

2.4.4 The Committee also received updates on the progress against Audit recommendations and monitors closely where these are not completed to a satisfactory level.

2.4.5 As of the date of this meeting, the Committee had received twelve final reports with the following assurance levels.

Assurance Level	Number of Final Reports
Substantial	1
Reasonable	7
Partial	1
n/a	3
Total	12

- 2.4.6 Although the 2020/21 Audit Plan has been impacted by COVID, 50% (13 of 26) of planned reviews have been finalised to draft stage and an additional 20% of the plan is in progress. The remaining audits are scheduled to begin in March and will be concluded early in 2021/22.
- 2.4.7 The Committee concentrates its attention to high priority recommendations made in reports. Where a report carries a partial assurance level, the Committee usually receives a verbal update from the relevant Director or Service Manager to outline how the review is being dealt with and how the assurance can be improved. Where a partial assurance is given, the Internal Audit team will perform a formal follow up within six months and report back to the Audit Committee to outline how recommendations have been implemented and whether the assurance level has increased.
- 2.4.8 The Internal Audit team operate under the guidelines laid down by the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the Council also has an Audit Charter in place that is brought to the Committee for approval annually.
- 2.4.9 Internal Audit also provide assurance through an Annual Report that the Council's overall control environment is satisfactory and whether any key weaknesses should be addressed in the Annual Governance Statement. This report was received in July 2020 and highlighted no new areas of concern.
- 2.5 Accounts
- 2.5.1 Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the requirements for the completion and auditing of the Statement of Accounts were reviewed by Government. The deadline for the completion of the unaudited accounts was moved from 31 May to 31 August.
- 2.5.2 The Committee therefore considered the Council's draft accounts at its September meeting. The Committee received the draft Audit Findings report at its meeting on 18 December 2020, where the External Auditors reported their findings and noted

that further work to clarify the Council's asset valuations was needed before they could issue their overall opinion. This work is still ongoing and the Committee will receive the final audited set of accounts for approval once this work is completed.

2.5.3 The External Auditor also reported alongside their draft Audit Findings that the Council has proper arrangements in place for securing Value for Money.

2.5.4 The Committee will receive the Annual Audit Letter once the audit is concluded.

2.6 Corporate Governance

2.6.1 The Committee is responsible for ensuring the Council meets the requirements of the Code of Corporate Governance and the Good Governance Principles. The CIPFA/SOLACE document 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework's core principal is that local government develop and shapes its own approach to governance. The Council has a Local Code of Corporate Governance and Good Governance Principles which the Committee have previously reviewed.

2.7 Treasury Management

2.7.1 The Audit Committee has responsibility for monitoring the Council's arrangements for Treasury Management and received reports for scrutiny on a quarterly basis, together with consultation on the proposed Treasury Management Strategy Statement.

2.7.2 The Committee take a keen interest in Treasury Management matters and question Officers around the security of the Council's investments and its approach to capital financing.

2.8 Risk Management Monitoring

2.8.1 The Committee has received regular updates on the risk management process and that the corporate risk register is being looked at on a regular basis. It is not the Committee's duty to determine that risks are being correctly identified and managed, more that the process of monitoring risks is being adhered to and that regular updates on risk management are given to the Executive and Scrutiny Panels where appropriate.

2.9 Fraud Prevention and Whistleblowing

2.9.1 The promotion of fraud awareness is important to Audit Committee Members who encourage officers in their efforts. Any incidences of fraud are reported to the Committee through the Internal Audit quarterly reports.

3. CONSULTATION

None

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 Audit Committees are a key component of an authority's governance framework. The purpose of an audit committee is to provide independent assurance on the adequacy of the risk management framework, the internal control environment and the integrity of the financial reporting and annual governance process. By overseeing internal and external audit, it makes an important contribution to ensuring that effective assurance arrangements are in place.
- 4.2 The Audit Committee's annual report (together with the Audit Committee Minutes which are reported to Council throughout the year) provides the Council with information to show how the Audit Committee has fulfilled its role during the year and provides independent assurance to the Council on the adequacy of the risk management framework, the internal control environment and the integrity of the financial reporting and annual governance process.
- 4.3 Thanks to the work of all members of the Committee, as well as the support of officers and the work and support of the external auditor, the Committee has continued to provide robust challenge to all audit and governance arrangements within their remit.
- 4.4 **It is recommended that the Audit Committee note and accept this report.**

5. CONTRIBUTION TO THE CARLISLE PLAN PRIORITIES

- 5.1 The Audit Committee ensures that an effective governance framework is in place to underpin the delivery of Carlisle City's Priorities.

Contact Officer: **Chair of Audit Committee** **Ext:** n/a

Appendix A **Rules of Governance**
Appendix B **Audit Committee Agendas**
attached to report:

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government Act 1972 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:

- **None**

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS:

Legal – The administration of the Council and its financial transactions must be subject to some form of check and accountability. In addition to political accountability through elected members and central government, and judicial review through the courts, there is accountability and control through the audit system. Internal audit controls are governed mostly by the non-statutory codes of practice developed by the profession. External audit controls are subject to a much greater body of law and, while always important, became more extensive in recent years. This Report forms part of our Governance procedure to provide reassurance that the Council operates properly and that there are checks in place to ensure maintain and improve that position.

Finance – It is best practice for the Chair of the Audit Committee to prepare an Annual Report outlining the work undertaken by the Audit Committee during the year.

Equality – None

Information Governance – There are no information governance implications with this report

Property Services - None

RULES OF GOVERNANCE

1. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of an Audit Committee is to provide independent assurance of the adequacy of the risk management framework and the associated control environment, independent scrutiny of the authority's financial and non-financial performance to the extent that it affects the authority's exposure to risk and weakens the control environment, and to oversee the financial reporting process.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

2.1 Audit Activity

To consider the Designated Head of Internal Audit's annual report and opinion, and a summary of internal audit activity (actual and proposed) and the level of assurance it can give over the Council's corporate governance arrangements.

To consider summaries of specific internal audit reports as requested.

To consider reports dealing with the management and performance of the providers of internal audit services.

To consider a report from internal audit on agreed recommendations not implemented within a reasonable timescale.

To consider the external auditor's annual letter, relevant reports, and the report to those charged with governance.

To consider specific reports as agreed with the external auditor.

To comment on the scope and depth of external audit work and to ensure it gives value for money.

To liaise with Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd over the appointment of the Council's external auditor.

To commission work from internal and external audit.

2.2 Regulatory Framework

To maintain an overview of the Council's Constitution in respect of Contract Procedure Rules, Financial Regulations and relevant Codes of Conduct.

To review any issue referred to it by the Town Clerk and Chief Executive or a Chief Officer, or any Council body.

To monitor the effective development and operation of risk management and corporate governance in the Council.

To monitor Council policies on "Raising Concerns at Work" and the anti-fraud and anti-corruption strategy and the Council's complaints process.

To oversee the production of and approve the authority's Annual Governance Statement.

To consider the Council's arrangements for corporate governance and agreeing necessary actions to ensure compliance with best practice.

To consider the Council's compliance with its own and other relevant published standards and controls.

2.3 Accounts

To consider the external auditor's report to those charged with governance on issues arising from the audit of the accounts.

To approve the Annual Statement of Accounts, income and expenditure and balance sheet. To consider whether appropriate accounting policies have been followed and whether there are concerns arising from the financial statements or from the audit that need to be brought to the attention of the Council.

To approve the Letter of Representation

3. ACCOUNTABILITY

- 3.1 The Audit Committee shall be a stand-alone Committee of the Council. All Audit Committee members shall act in the interests of the Council and not on behalf of any political party, constituency, ward, or interest group.
- 3.2 The Chair of the Audit Committee shall be appointed by the Committee. The Chair and the Committee shall ensure that relevant issues are promptly brought to the attention of the Executive, Overview and Scrutiny Panels and Regulatory Committees or the full Council.
- 3.3 The Chair of the Audit Committee shall present an Annual Report on the work of the Audit Committee to the full Council.

4. AUTHORITY AND ACCESS

- 4.1 The Audit Committee has a right to request relevant information from appropriate or relevant Members and Officers of the Council.
- 4.2 The Audit Committee shall not be able to transact the powers, functions and duties reserved to the full Council, the Executive, Overview and Scrutiny Panels and other Regulatory Committees.
- 4.3 The Audit Committee shall have access to in-house financial, legal and any other professional advice necessary to carry out its functions.
- 4.4 The Chair of the Audit Committee and the external and internal auditor shall meet as necessary and the Council's Designated Head of Internal Audit shall provide necessary services and support and assistance to the Audit Committee.
- 4.5 Any Member, Officer or member of the public who has any concern covered by the Terms of Reference of the Audit Committee may raise the matter with the Chair of the Committee who shall obtain, if necessary, relevant advice from the Council's Monitoring Officer or the Section 151, Corporate Director of Finance and Resources before taking any action with regard to the same.

5. MEMBERSHIP

- 5.1 Audit Committee members shall be appointed by the Council and consist of 7 members in accordance with the rules governing political balance. No member of the Executive and no chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels shall be eligible to be a member of the Audit Committee.
- 5.2 The Audit Committee shall be provided with administrative support by the Governance & Regulatory Services Directorate and reports/decisions of the Audit Committee shall be recorded and published on CMIS in the usual way. Financial Services shall provide technical support to the Committee when required. As the decisions of the Audit Committee shall not be of an executive nature, the decisions shall not be the subject of a request for call-in. If any Member is concerned about any decision of the Audit Committee, s/he should raise the matter with the Chair of the Audit Committee, the Monitoring Officer and/or the Section 151 Finance Officer and/or ask an oral question of the Chair of the Audit Committee at the Council meeting in accordance with the relevant Council Procedure Rules.

6. ATTENDANCE

- 6.1 The Audit Committee shall meet on a regular basis as provided for in paragraph 7 below. Officers and others may attend all or part of the meeting at the invitation of the Committee. Attendees may include:
- The Leader or Deputy Leader
 - The Portfolio Holder for Finance
 - Portfolio Holders
 - Town Clerk and Chief Executive
 - Corporate Director of Finance and Resources (Section 151)
 - Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services (Monitoring Officer)
 - Designated Head of Internal Audit
 - Other Chief Officers and Managers, as required
- 6.2 Subject to the relevant meeting complying with the Access to Information paragraphs for the exclusion of members of the public, the Audit Committee shall at least annually meet:
- (i) in private, with the external and internal auditors together; and/or
 - (ii) in private, with the external auditor.

7. MEETINGS

- 7.1 The Audit Committee shall meet at least four times a year in accordance with the schedule of meetings agreed by the Council. The External Auditor or the Designated Head of Internal Audit may request a meeting if they consider it necessary and other special meetings may be called in accordance with the Council's Procedure Rules.
- 7.2 The members of the Audit Committee shall commit to receiving appropriate training and development necessary to fulfil their roles.

8. QUORUM

- 8.1 The quorum for any meeting shall be one quarter of the elected members of the Committee, subject to there being not less than two elected members present at any time.

9. WORK PROFILE OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

9.1 In furtherance of the Terms of Reference and not otherwise, the Audit Committee is likely to receive and advise upon the following areas of work:

- Whether there is an appropriate culture of risk management and related control throughout the Council;
- the Annual Governance Statement;
- the annual Statement of Accounts, including changes in and compliance with accounting policies and practices, major judgemental areas and significant adjustments resulting from the audit;
- significant changes required to Financial Procedure Rules and the Contracts Procedure Rules.
- the framework and processes for risk assessment, analysis and management within the Council;
- the effective co-ordination between internal and external audit;
- the budget needed to resource effective internal and external audit and other responsibilities of the Audit Committee; and
- generally, on how the Audit Committee could add value to the work and operation of the Council.

9.2 External Audit and Inspection Agencies

- To note the fees and terms of engagement of the external auditor.
- To review the planned programme of work with the external auditor.
- To consider the annual statutory audit and to advise the Executive on any response to any audit management letters, reports and investigations, including Value for Money studies and other inspection reports.
- To review whether agreed external or internal audit or inspection recommendations have been implemented by the Executive as timetabled.
- To discuss with the external auditor any problems, reservations or issues arising from the interim or final audit or other investigations.
- To review the external auditor's independence and objectivity and annually appraise the Executive on the effectiveness and value for money of the external audit service.

9.3 Corporate Governance Framework

- To review and advise the Executive on the embedding and maintenance of an effective system of corporate governance including internal control and risk management.

- To give an assurance to the Council that there is a sufficient and systematic review of the corporate governance, internal control and risk management arrangements within the Council.
- To review the Annual Governance Statement and make appropriate recommendations to the Council, the Executive, the Overview and Scrutiny Panels and Regulatory Committees.
- To ensure that any significant weaknesses identified are remedied.
- To commission, if necessary, any relevant investigations into matters of particular concern relating to internal control.
- To ensure that the impact of any alleged or fraudulent activity on the Council's framework of internal control is reviewed and, where necessary, to recommend changes to strengthen the control framework.
- To receive reports relating to those aspects of whistle blowing or alleged or actual fraudulent activity which relate to the Terms of Reference of the Audit Committee.

9.4 Internal Audit

To review and make recommendations to the Executive regarding:

- The effectiveness of internal audit;
- the internal audit function to ensure it is adequately resourced;
- the internal audit strategy, annual plan and to monitor delivery of the plan;
- any internal audit protocols and policies;
- significant audit findings, together with the response from managers to these reports;
- any difficulties encountered by internal audit including any restrictions on the scope of activities or access to required information;
- agreed internal audit recommendations to ensure they are implemented by management as timetabled; and
- the annual report from the Designated Head of Internal Audit.

9.5 Other

- To consider and make recommendations to the Executive on:
- the selection and terms of appointment of other appropriate advisors and consultants;
- governance issues relating to the operation of the Audit Committee, and
- the proportionality, independence, and appropriateness of any of the Council's policies relating to any audit or governance matters;
- such other matters of an audit, financial or governance nature as fall within the terms of reference of the Committee or as may be referred by the Council.

Audit Committee Agenda's

30th July 2020

- A1. Minutes of Business & Transformation Scrutiny Panel
- A2. External Audit Plan
- A3. External Audit Progress report and sector update
- A4. Internal Audit Annual Report 2019/20
- A5. Audit Committee's Annual Report 2019/20
- A6. Internal Audit Progress 2019/20 (January – March)
- A7. Internal Audit Plan and Progress 2020/21 (April – June)
- A8. Draft Annual Governance Statement 2019/20
- A9. Draft Statement of Accounts (Progress Report) – 2019/20
- A10. Treasury Management Outturn 2019/20

24th September 2020

- A1. Minutes of Business & Transformation Scrutiny Panel
- A2. External Audit Progress report and sector update
- A3. Internal Audit Progress 2020/21 (April – September)
- A4. Statement of Accounts 2019/20
- A5. Treasury Management: April – June 2020

18th December 2020

- A1. Minutes of Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel
- A2. External Audit Findings for Carlisle City Council
- A3. Statement of Accounts 2019/20 and 2020/21
- A4. Internal Audit Progress 2020/21 (October - December)
- A5. Internal Audit Report – Local Air Quality Management
- A6. Internal Audit Report – City Centre
- A7. Internal Audit Report – Carlisle Partnership
- A8. Draft Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Strategy 2021/22
- A9. Treasury Management Quarter 2 2020 and Forecasts for 2021/22 to 2025/26

15th March 2021

- A1. Minutes of Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel
- A2. External Audit Progress Report and Sector Update
- A3. Audit Committee Annual Report
- A4. Internal Audit Plan 2021/22

- A5. Treasury Management October to December 2020
- A6. Internal Audit Progress 2020/21 (January to March)
- A7. Internal Audit Reports
- A8. The Redmond Review