

**CITY OF DONCASTER COUNCIL**

**AUDIT COMMITTEE**

**THURSDAY, 1ST FEBRUARY, 2024**

A MEETING of the AUDIT COMMITTEE was held at the COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICE, WATERDALE, DONCASTER DN1 3BU, on THURSDAY, 1ST FEBRUARY, 2024, at 10.00 am.

**PRESENT:**

Chair - Councillor Austen White  
Vice-Chair - Councillor Glenn Bluff

Councillors Sue Farmer, John Healy and Dave Shaw

**APOLOGIES:**

Apologies for absence were received from Co-opted Member, Dr Stuart Green

112 **Declarations of Interest, if any**

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

113 **Minutes of the meeting held on 23rd November 2023.**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd November 2023, be approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

114 **Audit Committee Action Log.**

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on actions agreed at previous Committee Meetings and allowed Members chance to measure the progress against these actions.

The report outlined that all actions were now complete, with non-outstanding.

**RESOLVED** that the Audit Committee note the progress made against the actions.

115 **An update on the Hackney Carriage/Private Hire Licensing Service Review/ Rapid Improvement Project.**

Members were provided with a report detailing the outcome of the Hackney Carriage / Private Hire Licensing Review and provided information relating to any outstanding actions.

The review undertaken in June 2022, had provided a partial assurance opinion due to a number of weaknesses in the area which were in need of rectifying.

In order to address the root cause of these issues, a Rapid Improvement Plan had been instigated, which identified a number of solutions to the issues contained within the service. The update outlined to the Committee, the work undertaken since this point. The work carried

out had now gone a long way in addressing the issues, with a large number of actions completed. Work still to be undertaken included the following: -

- Develop and go live with Vehicle Process
- Carry out user acceptance testing with the trade on new products.
- Develop and go live with driver process.
- Complete call study and forecast required resources for telephone line opening.
- Secure resources for telephone line opening and open telephone lines.
- Reduce/close the email channel.
- Design and deliver chat bot / AI telephony opportunities.

Kelly Hopkins, and Clare Bignell, were in attendance at the meeting to respond to any questions and concerns voiced by the Committee with Member's main concerns relating to IT Systems and the changes proposed. Officers were confident that all key issues had been addressed and the Team was working in a much more efficient and transparent manner. Members welcomed the report and demonstrated the work undertaken by the Licensing Team alongside the Audit Team in overcoming the issues presented in 2023.

Members generally felt that it was a good news story and a lot of improvements had been made to the service, but the Committee requested that a further update report be provided in a years' time to see what further improvements had been made in the period.

RESOLVED that: -

- 1) The Audit Committee note the contents of the report; and
- 2) An update report be presented to the Audit Committee in January 2025 with further information on the project.

#### 116 CYPF Commissioning Arrangements.

Members considered a report that provided information with regard to the failure to comply with contract procedure rules within the Children Young People and Families Directorate, but also to offer assurance with regard to commissioning plans and activities in the future.

Members noted that the majority of non-compliant spend related to individual placements for children and young people, meaning that expenditure made on contract or agreements did not fully meet the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and breached certain financial thresholds.

Upon consideration of the report, the Committee was invited to raise any concerns to the officers in attendance in order to gauge a full understanding of the issues.

Officers informed the Committee that they were working closely with officers from the Procurement Team to address the issues and reduce spending where it could be avoided.

Out of area placements continued to be a problematic area, and work was being done to ensure these were minimised, which helped not only reduce spending but also provided a better outcome for the child. It was a particularly challenging environment to address as the issues arose largely out of ensuring that statutory responsibilities were met, but it was agreed that keeping children closer to home was positive in all aspects of the arising situation.

A number of key actions had been put into place which would hopefully look to improve the situation further. These included: -

- New Fostering Strategy – a number of new foster carers had been recruited which would widen the number of spaces in the area.

- Ensure the workforce was well trained and encouragement given to ensuring the retention of staff within the borders.
- All care homes had an Ofsted rating of good or above and maintaining these ratings was key.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Audit Committee note the significant measures in place for placements / commissioned packages that are recorded as not being compliant with Contract Procedure Rules and to provide details of the controls and mitigations that are in place and future work with the market to attempt to mitigate further non-compliant spend;
- 2) an update be provided to the Audit Committee in October 2024, detailing the current status of the spend on placements and work to date to mitigate the existing issues; and
- 3) The Audit Committee note the work undertaken by the CYPF Directorate and the Commissioning Team, in conjunction with the Strategic Procurement Team (SPT) to ensure compliance and delivery of services.

#### 117 Internal Audit Progress Report for the period: October to December 2023.

Members considered a report which outlined the Annual Audit Report for the period October 2023 to December 2023. The report provided information on the work undertaken by Internal Audit during this period.

The report was split into 4 sections as highlighted below:-

Section 1 – The Audit Plan / Revisions to the Plan

Section 2 – Audit Work undertaken during the period.

Section 3 – Implementation of Management Actions arising from Audit Recommendations

Section 4 – Internal Audit performance.

More detailed information was provided on these areas within the body of report, but Members commented they were pleased to see this was largely a positive report.

In relation to the Internal Audit work carried out, Members raised some queries that were highlighted within the report including the following points: -

- Schools Controls Risk Self-Assessment – this was a useful tool to see how schools were performing.
- Purchase Cards – this was felt to be a good action, and allowed the identification of any breaches of policy and unusual patterns and ensure that purchases were being made in a clear and transparent way.
- Temporary Staff – Officers informed the Committee that they were happy with the number of vacancies within the Audit Team currently and assurance was given that the work was manageable.

In terms of the management actions outstanding from Internal Audit work, Members noted that timescales had been agreed for all of them, and progress was being continually reviewed.

Officers reassured the Committee that that the picture within the report was a very positive outlook, and things were moving satisfactorily.

Members noted that as a whole, the outlook was promising, and Officers from Internal Audit were confident that a clear positive unqualified opinion would be issued.

RESOLVED that the Audit Committee: -

- 1) Note the position of the Internal Audit Plan;
- 2) Note the Internal Audit Work completed within the period;
- 3) The position with regard to the implementation of management actions arising from internal audit recommendations be noted; and
- 4) The current position regarding the ability to deliver the annual opinion over the Council's risk, governance and control arrangements be noted.

#### 118 Grant Thornton Auditor's Annual Report 2022/23.

The Council's External Auditor's Grant Thornton were in attendance at the meeting to present their Annual Report to the Committee for 2022/23.

Perminder Sethi and Gareth Mills presented their findings and responded to Members queries.

The Annual Report had been concluded in early January 2024 with a value for money (VfM) conclusion given which was very positive for the Council and the Committee noted that the Audit Certificate would be issued at the conclusion of the meeting. This was a very positive achievement for the Council and was testament to the work of the staff that this had been completed, particularly as Doncaster was a large local authority, and across the Country there still remained in the region of 1000 Councils still to complete their annual audits.

Within the Executive Summary of the report, it was noted that a key recommendation had been agreed in relation to the Councils Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and additionally, two improvement recommendations relating to the monitoring of the Councils financial position and also, its financial sustainability in the current economic climate. Members expressed concern over the worsening position in relation to the Councils Dedicated Schools Grant and received assurances from officers around a high level of activity to manage this area which was a problem nationally too.

Through the course of discussion, the future of the airport was highlighted, and this would be monitored moving forward as well as a number of other points, including the ongoing financial pressures, Ofsted Inspections, Big Picture Learning and the pressures from Childrens and Youngs Peoples Services across the whole of the Council which continued to be an area of concern. Keeping children safe continued to be the overarching factor, but this was having to be balanced against a continually worsening financial position. However, widely speaking the overview was positive and Members welcomed the annual report.

RESOLVED that the Audit Committee note the Annual Report and the recommendations contained within.

119 Grant Thornton - Audit Findings (ISA 260) report 2022/23 - Final Version - Information only.

Members considered the Audit Findings (ISA 260) Report, which was presented by Grant Thornton, the Council's External Auditors. Gareth Mills and Perminder Sethi, were in attendance at the meeting in order to respond to any queries if necessary.

Members noted that the report was for information only and had also been considered previously by the Committee at their November meeting.

RESOLVED that the Audit Findings (ISA 260) Report be noted.

CHAIR: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_