

**MINUTES OF THE  
AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE**  
held on 26 November 2025 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor N. Walsh (Chair)

Councillors, H. Clark, N. Dudley, J. Raven, M. Sismey, A. Sosin and S. Young

Independent Persons –

Mr C Groves

Ms J Hoeckx

### 1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies were received from Councillors G. Bonnett, N. Bugbee and S. Rajesh. Councillor Young substituted for Cllr Bugbee.

### 2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 17 September 2025 were confirmed as a correct record.

### 3. Declarations of Interests

All Members were reminded to disclose any interests in items of business on the meeting's agenda and that they should do so at this point on the agenda or as soon as they became aware of the interest. They were also obliged to notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest within 28 days of the meeting if they had not been previously notified. None were made.

### 4. Public Questions

There were no questions or statements from members of the public.

### 5. Announcements

No announcements were made.

### 6. External Audit Update

The Committee received an update from Debbie Hanson, Ernst & Young LLP on the draft Auditor's Annual Report for 2024/25. Members were advised that the report was required to be issued by the end of November and provided commentary on the Council's arrangements for securing value for money and progress on the audit of the financial statements.

It was reported that the audit work was substantially complete and that the final version of the report was expected before Christmas, with the audit certificate to follow once the Whole of Government Accounts procedures had been concluded. Due to prior-year disclaimers and insufficient evidence over opening balances, the auditor anticipated issuing a disclaimed opinion for 2024/25. The Annual Governance Statement had been found to be consistent with the auditor's understanding, and no significant weaknesses had been identified in the Council's Value for Money arrangements, and no recommendations had been made. The auditor highlighted that progress had been achieved in many areas, including debtors and creditors, although working papers in these areas remained a challenge.

The Committee noted that the Council's reserves remained above the recommended minimum and that the Medium Term Financial Strategy had been updated to address future budget gaps.

In response to questions it was noted that:

- the difficulties in auditing debtors and creditors arose because data was drawn from multiple systems, requiring extensive sampling and reconciliation, which was common across councils.
- with regard to Property, Plant and Equipment valuations, the auditor confirmed that these were material balances and would be subject to indexation from 2025/26.

The Committee thanked the finance team and the auditors for their work and noted the positive progress that had been made.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update be noted.

(7.00pm to 7.15pm)

## 7. Counter Fraud & Corruption Policy and Strategy 2025

The Committee received a report from the Audit Services Manager on the Counter Fraud and Corruption Policy and Strategy 2025. It was explained that the updated policy aimed to minimise the risk of fraud and corruption and its impact. The Committee was reminded that the new offence of Failure to Prevent Fraud, introduced by the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023, had come into effect in September 2025. This legislation was designed to hold organisations to account if they benefited from fraud committed by employees, and the policy set out the measures the Council had in place to comply with this requirement.

It was shared that the policy was based on best practice guidance, including Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally and the CIPFA Code of Practice, and incorporated prevention measures for bribery and corruption. The accompanying strategy outlined actions to be delivered over the next two years, including updates to training and the use of technology and artificial intelligence to strengthen fraud prevention and detection. It was noted that while AI could be a valuable tool in preventing fraud, it also posed risks as a potential enabler of fraudulent activity.

In response to questions it was noted that:

- mandatory fraud awareness training had been provided to staff in 2024 and was refreshed every three years and was also a mandatory part of the induction process for new staff. Additional resources were available on the intranet, and face-to-face sessions are being considered for staff who did not work on PCs. Councillors had received a workbook from the Local Government Association earlier in the year, and links to e-learning modules would be circulated. Members also discussed the need to address emerging risks such as AI-enabled document fraud.
- the Council's governance framework remained robust and that the external auditor's value for money assessment had confirmed that appropriate controls were in place. The Committee was assured that mechanisms for managing audit risk and fraud were operating effectively.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted and that the Counter Fraud and Corruption Policy and Strategy 2025 be endorsed.

(7.15pm to 7.24pm)

## 8. Work Programme

The Committee were updated on the rolling work programme of future reports and work for the next series of meetings.

Members were reminded that the meeting of December had been cancelled, and an additional meeting was arranged for January 2026.

**RESOLVED** that the work programme be agreed.

(7.25pm to 7.26pm)

## 9. Urgent Business

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.26pm.

Chair