

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: AUDIT COMMITTEE - 19TH NOVEMBER, 2019

REPORT OF:

PRESENT: P. WILLIAMS (CHAIR)

Councillors S. Healy (Vice-Chair)
G. Collier
M. Cross
L. Elias
J. Hill
J. Holt
L. Parsons
K. Rowson
B. Summers
S. Thomas
J. Wilkins

WITH: Rhian Hayden, Chief Resources Officer
Louise Rosser
Andrea Owen
Steve Berry

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
No. 2	<u>APOLOGIES</u> Apologies for absence were received for Councillors H. Trollope and L. Winnett.	

No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>The following declaration of interest was reported:</p> <p>Councillor L. Parsons - <i><u>Item No. 8 – Wales Audit Office – Delivering with Less – Leisure Services</u></i></p>	
No. 4	<p><u>AUDIT COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The minutes of the Audit Committee held on 10th September, 2019 were submitted for accuracy points.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>The Audit Manager presented the final Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2018/19, which provided an assessment of the effectiveness of the Authority's governance arrangements. The Officer spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein.</p> <p>In response to a question raised by a Member, the Officer confirmed that any recommendations for development are made in the statement and would be actioned throughout the year, and progress against recommendations would be included in the 2019/20 AGS.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the AGS be approved and adopted.</p>	
No. 6	<p><u>THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES 2018/19</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance.</p> <p>The Solicitor presented the report which informed the Audit Committee of the Council's performance with regard to complaints to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. He spoke to the</p>	

report and highlighted points contained therein, and said he was pleased to report that Blaenau Gwent Council had the lowest number of service complaints received by the Ombudsman in Wales.

In response to a question raised by a Member, the Officer explained that the Council had adopted a Local Resolution Policy whereby the Head of Legal & Corporate Compliant would seek to resolve any issues prior to them escalating to formal procedures.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Audit Committee acknowledge that the process for monitoring of complaints was robust and the performance information provided reflected these practices.

No. 7 **AUDIT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT - JULY 2019 TO SEPTEMBER 2019**

Consideration was given to report of the Chief Officer Resources.

The Audit Manager presented the report which updated the Audit Committee on the progress against the Internal Audit Plan for the period 1st July to 30th September, 2019. The Officer spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein.

RESOVLED that the report be accepted and the progress on activities for the period 1st July to 30th September, 2019 be noted.

No. 8 **WALES AUDIT OFFICE - DELIVERING WITH LESS - LEISURE SERVICES**

Consideration was given to report of the Chief Officer Commercial.

The Chief Officer Commercial presented the report which outlined the findings of the Wales Audit Office review on Delivering with Less --Leisure Services reported in May 2019.

The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein. She confirmed that the proposals for improvement had been taken on board and included in the second phase of the ongoing Leisure and Culture Review.

A Member referred to Page 95 of the WAO report which stated that the 'review lacked timely and meaningful scrutiny Member

involvement'; and asked how it was intended to improve the process moving forward.

In response the Officer confirmed that since phase one of the review, a Members' Working Party was established by the Community Services Scrutiny Committee and the outcomes of that work had been reported back to the Committee. Reports on the current phase continue to be reported through the democratic process.

The Member referred to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee held the previous week where two major pieces of work were considered, namely the Waste Management & Recycling Strategy; and the Strategic Business Case for the Development of a Second HWRC. He said both were controversial issues affecting the County Borough, and expressed concern that only a small number of Members had had the opportunity to scrutinise and make a decision on these strategic issues. He said the Leader of the Council in May 2017 gave assurance that Joint Committees would be convened to consider such items affecting the Council, like the Leisure Services Review, and expressed concern that this was not currently happening, resulting in approximately only 48% of Members having an input in major issues.

In response the Head of Governance & Partnerships said the only constituted Joint Committees under the Council's Constitution was Safeguarding and Budget Monitoring. She said balance was needed around the remit of Scrutiny Committees and the rationale for 'opening up' certain issues to all Members. However, she pointed out that if a Scrutiny Committee was 'opened up' to all Members, it was not a constituted Joint Committee in the same way as Safeguarding and Budget Monitoring, and only Members of the host Committee would have voting rights.

The Member said he understood the process, but where demand was significant with major pieces of work affecting the Council, all Member Scrutiny Committees should be convened, as per the Leader's commitment in May 2017.

Another Member said the Officer had indicated that the Second Phase of the Leisure Services Review would be reported to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee for consideration by Members.

A Member said a more ‘joined up’ approach was needed and said a Cross Party Working Group should be established, along with Officers to meet with the Leisure Trust Board.

RESOLVED that the content of the Wales Audit Office review and findings on Delivering With Less – Leisure Services be accepted and the Management Response be endorsed, as it provided assurance that the proposals for improvement would be fully endorsed.

No. 9 **WALES AUDIT OFFICE REVIEW: SERVICE USER PERSPECTIVE: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Consideration was given to report of the Head of Governance & Partnerships.

The Head of Governance & Partnerships presented the report which outlined the findings of the Wales Audit Office (WAO) review on Service User Perspective: Community Engagement reported in May 2019. The Council’s Management Response was attached at Appendix 2, and the report had also been positively received by the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the content of the Wales Audit Office review and findings on Service User Perspective: Community Engagement, and the Council’s Management Response be noted.