

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

**REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNANCE
& AUDIT COMMITTEE**

**SUBJECT: GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE - 29TH JUNE,
2021**

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: T. EDWARDS (CHAIR)

Councillors S. Healy (Vice-Chair)
P. Baldwin
D. Davies
D. Hancock
J. Hill
W. Hodgins
J. Holt
J. Millard
M. Moore
J. C. Morgan
K. Rowson
S. Thomas
H. Trollope
M. Veale

WITH: Chief Officer Resources
Audit & Risk Manager
Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
Professional Lead – Internal Audit
Service Manager, Registration, Elections & Corporate
Complaints
Data Protection & Governance Officer

AND: Mike Jones) Audit Wales
Alice Rushby)

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>An apology for absence was received from Councillors B Summers and L. Winnett.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.</p>	
No. 4	<p><u>APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR 2021/22</u></p> <p>Nominations were sought for the appointment of Chair of the Governance & Audit Committee for 2021/2022.</p> <p>A Member proposed that Mr. Terry Edwards be appointed to the role, and this proposal was seconded.</p> <p>RESOLVED that Mr. Terry Edwards be appointed Chair of the Governance & Audit Committee for 2021/2022.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS</u></p> <p>Following a discussion, it was</p> <p>RESOLVED that meetings continue to be held at 9.30 a.m.</p>	
No. 6	<p><u>AUDIT COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The minutes of the Audit Committee held on 27th April, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p>A Member referred to p. 5 of the minutes, namely discussion around the number of Officers leaving the Authority, and said the Audit & Risk Manager had stated that this would be factored into the risk assessment and the comments made by Members would be noted.</p>	

	RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.	
No. 7	<p><u>ACTION SHEET - 27TH APRIL, 2021</u></p> <p>There were no actions arising from the meeting held on 27th April, 2021.</p>	
No. 8	<p><u>GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2021-22</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Audit & Risk Manager.</p> <p>The Audit & Risk Manager presented the Governance & Audit Committee Forward Work Programme for 2021-22, attached at Appendix 1.</p> <p>A Member asked that the risk to the Authority in relation to the number of Officers leaving, and staff sickness be added to the FWP. He also sought assurance that exit interviews were being conducted.</p> <p>The Audit & Risk Manager said the FWP listed the reports that would be submitted to the Committee during the year. However, the issues raised by the Member would sit within the remit of the Audit Plan which would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.</p> <p>A Member referred to the implications for the Committee as a result of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act, and asked whether a revised Terms of Reference for the Committee would be reported prior to May 2022.</p> <p>In response the Chief Officer Resources explained that the FWP was based on previous years, however, it was subject to change and movement throughout the year to take account of additional items etc.</p> <p>Another Member sought assurance that the relevant Officers would be in attendance when the Audit Wales report on Silent Valley was brought to Committee for consideration.</p> <p>The Chief Officer Resources said she was unable to comment on</p>	

when the report could be expected, but assured that relevant Officers would be in attendance when the report was presented.

The Audit Wales Officer said he was unable to provide a date for submission of the Silent Valley report but confirmed that the report had now been circulated to the individuals identified in the report for comments. He also confirmed that the Audit Wales Audit Plan would be submitted to the special meeting of the Committee on the 27th July, 2021.

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing amendments, that the report be accepted and the Forward Work Programme for the Governance & Audit Committee be agreed (Option 2).

No. 9

CODE OF GOVERNANCE

Consideration was given to the report of the Audit & Risk Manager.

The Audit & Risk Manager presented the revised Code of Governance for approval (Appendix 1). The Code of Governance was updated on at least an annual basis to ensure it reflected the current governance arrangements of the Authority, and formed the basis against which the Annual Governance Statement was produced. The Officer confirmed that the draft Annual Governance Statement would be reported to the special meeting of the Committee in July.

The Officer highlighted the three main areas of change within the Code of Governance as follows:-

- Core Principle A, as a result of the review of the Corporate Plan undertaken during 2020 some amendments had been made to the Outcome Statements developed;
- the new Corporate Communications Strategy 2020-25 linked to the Council's Commercial Strategy 2020-24; and
- the document had been updated to reflect the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act and resulting changes for the Committee.

In response to a question raised by a Member, the Officer confirmed that the revised Code of Governance had been considered by CLT to ensure it reflected the governance framework of the Authority, however, she assured that the Committee was responsible for approving the Code of

	<p>Governance.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Committee approve and adopt the revised Code of Governance (Option 1).</p>	
<p>No. 10</p>	<p><u>UPDATED CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance.</p> <p>The Head of Legal & Corporate compliance presented the report which outlined the updated Concerns and Complaints Policy.</p> <p>The Officer reported that as part of the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019, a new Complaints Standards Authority (CSA) had been created. Policy and Guidance had been issued under the powers contained within Section 36 of the Act and they applied to public service providers in Wales. The CSA has produced a model Concerns and Complaints Policy and there was an expectation for public authorities to adopt the model policy to ensure consistency of complaints handling throughout Wales. The draft Policy had been brought to Committee prior to it being presented to Council in July.</p> <p>The Officer explained that the Council was required to provide the CSA with complaints data on a quarterly basis and report to the Governance and Audit Committee the number and types of complaints received, their outcomes and any remedial action taken as a consequence. It was for the Council to determine how frequently it should receive such reports, however this should be at least twice a year.</p> <p>The Officer also reported that the Committee would now have additional functions to include a role in oversight for complaints and would have statutory powers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and assess the authority’s ability to handle complaints effectively; and • Make reports and recommendations in relation to the Authority’s ability to handle complaints effectively. <p>The Officer pointed out that this Policy referred to service complaints and not complaints relating to conduct which sat with</p>	

the Monitoring Officer and the Standards Committee.

In response to a question raised, the Officer explained that service complaints were referred to the Department responsible for the service, and hopefully resolved at an early stage. However, if this was not possible it was escalated further.

A Member referred to the fact that schools had their own complaints procedures in place, and asked how these would align with the new Policy.

The Officer confirmed that both Social Services and Education had adopted their own complaints procedures. Work would be done moving forward to review all the Council's co-joined complaints procedures to ensure consistency with the required standards of the new CSA, and to keep those documents under review.

A Member referred to the additional function for the Committee to receive complaints against the Authority, and asked whether this would include complaints in relation to Education and Social Services.

The Officer said currently complaints in those areas were reported to the relevant Scrutiny Committee. However, to ensure effective oversight of all complaints procedures it was intended to bring these to the Governance & Audit Committee, and the Officer confirmed that this would be discussed with the Departments.

A Member said there was no mention that a person could nominate a spokesperson to act on their behalf and suggested that this be included within the Policy.

The Officer noted the Member's comment.

RESOLVED that, subject to the foregoing amendment, the report be accepted and the Committee agree the information contained within the Concerns and Complaints Policy before adoption by Council; and that a complaints report be presented to the Governance & Audit Committee on a bi-annual basis in October and April each year (Option 2).

No. 11

AUDIT WALES REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Consideration was given to the report of Audit Wales.

The Audit Wales Officer presented a letter which had been sent to all Councils informing of Audit Wales' intention to review the reporting arrangements currently in place, in order to have a more consistent approach. Audit Wales would be engaging with Councils to ensure all reports are submitted to Committee and that recommendations are taken forward.

A Member pointed out that the new arrangements may impact on the deadlines set out in the FWP.

RESOLVED that the Audit Wales be accepted and the information contained therein be acknowledged.