

Ashford Borough Council: Audit Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Audit Committee held in the Council Chamber Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **28th November 2023**.

Present:

Councillor Krause (Chair);
Councillor Gambling (Vice-Chair);

Cllrs. Bartlett, Dean, Hallett, Hayward, McGeever, Shilton.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c) Councillors Shilton and Bartlett attended as Substitute Members for Councillors Feacey and Smith respectively.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Feacey, Smith.

In attendance:

Deputy Chief Executive, Service Lead Finance, Senior Accountant, Audit Planning Manager, Senior Member Services Officer.

Also in Attendance (virtually):

Corporate Director of Health & Wellbeing.

Key Audit Partner – Grant Thornton UK.

216 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 3rd October 2023 be approved and confirmed as a correct record, subject to a note that Cllr Krause was absent due to Mayoral Duties.

217 Declaration of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Bartlett	Made a Voluntary Announcement as a Member of Kent County Council who administer the Ashford Borough Council pension fund.	218

218 Statement of Accounts 2021/22 and External Auditors Findings

The Senior Accountant introduced the report which included the Statement of Accounts 2021/22 for approval. She advised that Appointed Auditor, Grant Thornton UK, were proposing to issue an unmodified opinion on the 2021/22 Statement of Accounts. The first time the accounts had been seen was the end of July 2022, with them being sent for audit in November 2022. Since that time the net pension liability had changed due to the triannual review, and the delays in public sector auditing, meaning new more up to date information was available for consideration.

The Key Audit Partner – Grant Thornton UK confirmed that whilst this had been a protracted process it was nearing the end. The accounts had been high quality with relatively few issues to note.

A Member questioned whether the amendment to the pension fund would result in a reduction in the contribution for the following year. The Service Lead Finance advised that the figures had been adjusted downwards due to the review as previously advised, however there had been an increase in the contributions to the superannuation fund which had also been taken into account. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that there had been some discussion in the industry regarding re-evaluations in Scotland, and there was some lobbying on an interim position for England.

There was some discussion regarding the old B&Q site that was under the control of the ABC Property Company. It was questioned whether previous issues around valuation had been resolve. The Service Lead Finance confirmed that the position had now been agreed although the Company accounts (for A Better Choice for Development Ltd.) reflected this as inventory and for the ABC Group Accounts they were shown as investment properties.

The Key Audit Partner – Grant Thornton UK advised that the value for money team were reviewing work with the aim of that being signed off within the next few weeks. It was hoped that this would be reported to the next meeting of the Audit Committee in March 2024.

Resolved:

That the Audit Committee

- (i) notes the Appointed Auditor's Audit Findings (Appendix A);**
- (ii) Agrees the basis upon which the accounts have been prepared (going concern);**
- (iii) Approves the 2021/22 Statement of Accounts (Appendix B);**
- (iv) Delegates authority to the Chairman of this committee and the Chief Financial Officer to agree any further amendments required to the statements shown at Appendix B;**

- (v) **Delegates authority to the Chairman of this Committee and the Chief Financial Officer to sign and date the accounts as required by Section 10(3) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003, following the stated amendments, as approved by the Council;**
- (vi) **Approves the Chief Financial Officer's Letter of Representation to the Appointed Auditor (Appendix C).**

219 Corporate Health and Safety

The Corporate Director of Health & Wellbeing gave a PowerPoint presentation in relation to Corporate Health and Safety, this covered the most common causes of fatal injuries, non-fatal injuries at work in Great Britain, the legal background and how health and safety was dealt with at Ashford Borough Council. An external review had taken place which included reviewing the Health and Safety Workplace management system and processes – this had taken place over a three day period and had a number of recommendations. Those recommendations were being acted on.

In response to questions from Members, the Corporate Director of Health & Wellbeing advised;

- Ashford Borough Council embraced the near-miss culture – he felt this was highly important and the use of RIDDOR forms was imperative. Whilst there had been a system and protocols in place to manage health and safety, these were being refreshed.
- Further guidance and support was to be provided to health and safety representatives so that they had the confidence to undertake their duties. He was personally taking responsibility for the refresh at Director level.
- There were KPIs in place and these could be reported to a future meeting of the Audit Committee so that they could have oversight of the data. It was suggested that this be reported in six months.
- The land around the Inland Border Post, that under the control of HMRC and Defra would be the responsibility of the Health and Safety Executive.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

220 Internal Audit Interim Report

The Audit Planning Manager introduced the report which provided updates on the 2023/24 audit plan which would be used to inform the 2023/24 Audit Opinion, and also covered, resource changes within the Mid Kent Audit Partnership and follow ups of agreed management actions. In respect of resourcing there had been and continued to be challenges. Progress had been made in filling vacant posts,

however some vacancies remained. To ensure that the audits scheduled for the year were completed they were utilising a contractor – The Audit Planning Manager confirmed that the use of contractor resource would be within the financial budget of the service. Drawing attention to the plan progress he highlighted the audits bought forward from the previous financial year and those due to be completed this year. Finally, in respect of follow ups – the vast majority of these had been agreed and completed. There were three outstanding actions which had been raised with Management Team.

A Member expressed her thanks to the Audit Planning Manager for the update, in particular his honesty in dealing with the resourcing issues that they had been experiencing. The Committee appreciated these issues were difficult to navigate but the way in which they had been, should be commended.

In response a question from the Committee regarding the audit on IT Disaster Recovery, the Deputy Chief Executive advised that the outstanding actions were to be the subject of a paper to the Councils Management Team and Information Governance Group. He confirmed that the Council was moving to a new back up centre and testing was to be carried out in due course. In respect of the sequencing of a recovery this could vary depending on the time of the year, therefore there needed to be a degree of flexibility.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

221 Report Tracker and Future Meetings

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that a six monthly Health and Safety update would be added to the Tracker.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted