

AUDIT SUB-COMMITTEE

06 September 2023

PRESENT:

Non-Grouped

Councillor A Wheelton (Chair)

Labour Group

Councillors D Shepherd (Vice-Chair) A Jones and A Tilley.

Conservative Group

In Attendance

Councillor R Pearson

Councillor S Taylor

AS/13 **APOLOGIES**

The Sub-Committee was informed that no apologies had been received.

AS/14 **TO RECEIVE THE OPEN MINUTES**

The Open Minutes for Sub-Committee Meeting held on 21 June 2023 were taken as read, approved, and signed by the Chair.

Councillor A Jones asked the Chair why the report on outstanding recommendations recorded in the minutes was not an agenda item for this meeting. The Chair confirmed that a response had been received from the Strategic Director (Service Delivery) and that this would be discussed later in the meeting. Members agreed for this to be noted in the minutes.

AS/15 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Sub-Committee was informed that no declarations of interest had been received.

AS/16 **TO RECEIVE ANY QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO.10**

The Sub-Committee was informed that no questions from members of the public had been received.

AS/17 **TO RECEIVE ANY QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO.11**

The Sub-Committee was informed that no questions from Members of the Council had been received.

MATTERS DELEGATED

AS/18 **INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT 2022/23**

The Audit Manager presented the report and a summary of the audit dashboard. The plan had progressed well and there were no concerns. Five audits had been completed with favourable position on outstanding recommendations. The overdue recommendations were either low or medium risk with favourable movement. Planned progress showed all reports and how each had progressed and there were no concerns.

The Chair was pleased with the report and expressed thanks to the Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) and the new team for improvements.

The Chair raised concerns about trees and that the 1126 outstanding tree inspections had been reduced to 350, but if there had been complaints from residents with possible issues why were these classed as moderate risks.

The Chair raised further concerns regarding Tree Protection Orders and conservation areas and that Planning enforcement action must be executed when required. Councillor A Jones raised a concern about the number of tree inspections and the lead time for the completion of the inspection.

The Chair had been informed in an email from the Strategic Director (Service Delivery) that additional resources had been engaged and that temporary agency staff had been in place during the absence of the full-time Tree Officer. The Tree Officer had provided training to a new officer and the outstanding works were now being addressed. A further update would be provided at a future meeting.

The Audit Manager advised that the moderate risk had been assessed by Officers.

The Head of Cultural and Community Services confirmed that as of June 2022 there had been 5,000 outstanding inspections. The backlog had been reduced due to contractors being engaged whilst the Tree Officer had been absent. The plan for the staff structure going forward would be for two full-time Tree Officers, one to cover South Derbyshire District Council trees and one to cover Planning plus an Assistant Tree Officer. Tree inspection requests were received and

triaged by Tree Officers and prioritised in terms of danger. There had been a high volume of inspections and the Officers had been responding to the public enquiries.

The Chair referred to the seven cases of unauthorised works or damage to trees and how these were dealt with and would this require a resolution and would the Auditors ensure that these seven cases are followed up. Members approved that a resolution was required.

The Audit Manager confirmed that they would seek the information required and progress that these cases are completed.

The Head of Cultural and Community Services confirmed that Planning and the Tree Officer would be required to respond to any queries on these cases.

The Chair informed Members that the Head of Operational Services was unable to attend the meeting, but in his absence, the Strategic Director (Service Delivery) had provided an email response relating to the outstanding recommendations on Grounds Maintenance, as requested at the previous meeting and a note about Enforcement Cases.

The statement confirmed that significant work had been carried out and included the following details:

Recommendation 1 GIS. The corporate GIS system was managed by IT. The post of Technical Officer was vacant but would have responsibility for maintaining the data in the GIS system.

Recommendation 2 Bill of Quantities. The work had continued in this area as new land had been identified and future costs would be applied as per the bill of quantities.

Recommendation 8 Monitoring Work. A system had been implemented with paper inspection checklists to be provided to Audit.

Enforcement Cases. A further update would be provided at a future meeting.

The Group Auditor confirmed that in respect of recommendation 1 GIS and recommendation 8 Monitoring Work that a date had been set to follow up progress in October.

The Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) noted that time would be required to respond to the Auditor's recommendations.

Councillor A Tilley enquired how many inspections were carried out in the year and asked for clarity on the low risk classification applied in the Parks and Open

Space category that no documented processes were in place for incidents in parks.

The Audit Manager confirmed that the processes for incidents in parks were known by the officers, however were not documented. There was a low risk that people would not know what to do if an incident occurred in a park.

The Head of Cultural and Community Services advised that a documented flow chart would be provided to Park Keepers and that they had been supplied with First Aid Kits.

The Chair asked for confirmation of which team were responsible for mobile phones and Councillor A Tilley sought clarity on the Mobile Device Manager items classified as low risk and if there was a date for completion.

The Audit Manager confirmed that IT are responsible for mobile phones.

The Group Auditor informed Members that that the risk rating was based on the overall impact to the authority and that the cumulative risk was calculated in the assurance rating which was medium.

RESOLVED:

1.1 That the report of the Audit Manager (Appendix 1) was considered, and any issues identified were subject to a follow-up report as appropriate.

1.2 That the outcomes of the seven Enforcement cases of damage to Tree Preservation Orders and conservation for the last twelve months are reported to this Committee by 01 November 2023.

AS/19 **AUDIT SUB-COMMITTEE SELF ASSESSMENT**

The Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) consulted the Committee on the proposal to form a member working group to complete a self-assessment exercise the findings of which would be reported to a future Committee. The proposed start date would be before the end of 2023. The work would take approximately four to five months to complete.

The Chair noted that the supporting report was for an Audit Committee and this was a Sub-Committee.

The Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) advised that through previous experience there would be a lot of paperwork, Terms of Reference and governance to be reviewed. The Audit Sub-Committee would refer to published processes and best practices and that these would then be followed stringently.

Councillor A Tilley enquired if training and guidance would be provided.

The Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) confirmed that specific Audit training would be provided for all Committee members on Wednesday, 11 October 2023 at 16:00 hours in the Council Chamber.

Councillor R Pearson was in attendance at the meeting and noted that this was an important issue.

RESOLVED:

1.1 *That the Audit Sub-Committee:*

- a) *Noted the report; and***
- b) *Considered forming an informal member working group to undertake a self-assessment of good practice and report back to a future Audit Sub-Committee meeting.***

AS/20 **COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) presented updated work programme and confirmed that the 2021-22 audit had concluded. A timetable of reports from the external auditor would be forthcoming.

The Audit Manager enquired whether the Internal Audit progress report would be required for the October meeting.

The Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) confirmed that the Finance and Management (Special) Committee scheduled for 19 October 2023 had been cancelled and proposed that the Audit Sub-Committee scheduled for Wednesday, 18 October be cancelled. The Committee approved the proposal.

RESOLVED:

The Sub-Committee considered and approved the updated work programme.

The Sub-Committee approved that the scheduled Audit Sub-Committee meeting on 19 October be cancelled.

AS/21 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 (AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT [ACCESS TO INFORMATION] ACT 1985)**

RESOLVED:

That in accordance with Section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the Meeting as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that there would be disclosed exempt information as defined in the paragraph of Part I of the Schedule 12A of the Act indicated in the header to each report on the Agenda.

AS/22 **EXEMPT QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO.11**

The Sub-Committee was informed that no questions from Members of the Council had been received.

The Meeting terminated at 16:50 hours

COUNCILLOR A WHEELTON

CHAIR