

GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 23 MARCH 2026

Present: Councillor S J Carr, Chair

Councillors: M Brown
R Bullock
A Cooper
J Couch
S Dannheimer
A Kingdon
J M Owen
S Webb
E Winfield

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K Woodhead, K A Harlow and S P Jeremiah

38 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K A Harlow, S P Jeremiah, J M Owen and K Woodhead.

39 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor S Dannheimer declared a disclosable non-pecuniary interest in item 8 as a director of Liberty Leisure, minute number 45 refers.

40 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2025 were confirmed and signed as a correct record, subject to the amendment of the attendance list.

41 **ANNUAL CONSTITUTION REVIEW**

The Governance, Audit and Standards Committee concluded its Annual Constitution Review on 24 November 2025 following acceptance of the Constitution Task and Finish Group's recommendations. On submission of the report to Council on 17 December 2025, Members resolved to refer the report back to the Committee for reconsideration.

At its meeting on 23 March 2026 the Governance, Audit and Standards Committee resolved to resubmit the report and its recommendations to full Council, with the addition of information included in the change table regarding restrictions around Portfolio Holders' speeches.

RECOMMENDED to Council that the amendments to the Constitution be approved.

42 AUDIT OF ACCOUNTS 2024/25 - AUDITOR'S ANNUAL REPORT

Further to earlier updates, the Council's appointed external auditors, Forvis Mazars, had fully concluded their work on the Statement of Accounts 2024/25. Forvis Mazars has published its Annual Audit Report for the year ended 31 March 2025 which was presented to Members.

It was stated that it was pleasing to report that the auditors had issued an unqualified audit opinion on the 2024/25 accounts and that the accounts and audit process was fully completed inside of statutory deadlines. As reported previously, officers were responding to the auditors' internal control recommendations, with the aim of resolving in time for preparing the 2025/26 accounts.

In terms of the auditors' Value for Money conclusion on whether the Council had made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, it was again pleasing to note that the auditors had not identified any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements that would require it to make a recommendation.

43 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2025/26 – ACCOUNTING POLICIES

The Committee noted the Council's accounting policies in relation to the production of the 2025/26 Statement of Accounts.

Prior to the completion of the Statement of Accounts 2025/26, it is considered good practice that Members are given the opportunity to discuss and comment on the accounting policies to be used in the production of the financial statements. These policies would be applied to the treatment of all transactions that make up the Statement of Accounts to ensure the accounts present a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council as at 31 March 2026.

RESOLVED that the Accounting Policies for 2025/26 be approved.

44 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2025/26 - UNDERLYING PENSION ASSUMPTIONS

The Committee noted the assumptions made by the Pension Fund Actuary in calculating the IAS19 figures to be reported in the 2025/26 Statement of Accounts.

IAS19 (International Accounting Standard 19 – Employee Benefits) is one of the financial reporting standards with which the Council must comply when producing its annual Statement of Accounts. The basic requirement of IAS19 is that an organisation should account for retirement benefits when it is committed to give them, irrespective of when they are paid out.

In order to calculate the cost of earned benefits for inclusion in the Statement of Accounts, the scheme actuaries use certain assumptions to reflect expected future

events which may affect the cost. The assumptions used should lead to the best estimate of the future cash flows that will arise under the scheme liabilities.

45 LIBERTY LEISURE LIMITED – EXTERNAL AUDIT ARRANGEMENTS 2025/26

Members noted the exemption of Liberty Leisure Limited from the requirement of an external audit for 2025/26.

The accounts of Liberty Leisure Limited must be subject to an audit due to the company being a subsidiary of an entity (i.e. the Council) that does require an audit. Although the company has a turnover of around £2.9 million, it does not meet the small companies' exemption criteria as set out in the Companies Act 2006 due to its relationship with the Council.

RESOLVED that Liberty Leisure Limited be exempt from requiring an external audit for 2025/26 in accordance with Part 16 Section 479 of the Companies Act 2006.

(Having declared a disclosable non-pecuniary interest, Councillor S Dannheimer left the meeting before discussion or voting thereon.)

46 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2026/27

The Internal Audit Plan sets out the proposed coverage for Internal Audit work in 2026/27. The mandate for the plan is derived from the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in collaboration with the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors.

RESOLVED that the Internal Audit Plan for 2026/27 be approved.

47 INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee noted the recent work completed by Internal Audit. Internal Audit had also reviewed progress made by management in implementing agreed actions within six months of the completion of the respective audits.

48 REVIEW OF STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

The Committee reviewed the amendments to the Strategic Risk Register and the action plans identified to mitigate risks.

RESOLVED that the amendments to the Strategic Risk Register and the actions to mitigate risks be approved.

49 QUARTERLY COMPLAINT REPORT

The Committee noted the summary of complaints made against the Council. Overall, of the 96 Stage 1 complaints received, 22 were investigated under the Stage 2

complaints procedure and three were investigated by the LGO or HO. Under the Stage 2 complaints procedure, 16 complaints were not upheld, 6 complaints were upheld.

50 FINDINGS OF FAULT DETERMINATIONS REPORTED FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

The Committee noted the recent findings of fault determinations made by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman.

51 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Work Programme.

RESOLVED that the Governance Audit and Standards Committee Work Programme be approved.