

Council Report

Audit Committee Meeting – 30th July 2024.

Title

Audit Committee Annual Report 2023/24.

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No.

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Judith Badger, Strategic Director, Finance and Customer Services.

Report Author(s)

Louise Ivens, Head of Internal Audit

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Ward(s) Affected

All wards.

Report Summary

The purpose of the Annual Report 2023/24 is to bring together in one document a summary of the work undertaken by the Audit Committee. The production of the report complies with current best practice for Audit Committees. It allows the Audit Committee to demonstrate it has fulfilled its terms of reference and share its achievements with the Council and is useful as a reminder to the organisation of the role of the committee in providing assurance about its governance, risk management and financial and business controls.

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) has previously issued guidance to local authorities to help ensure that Audit Committees operate effectively. The guidance recommends that Audit Committees should report annually on how they have discharged their responsibilities. The CIPFA guidance was revised and re-issued in 2022. As a result, the Audit Committee's Terms of Reference were updated and agreed at Audit Committee in March 2023, and were approved by full Council on 19th July 2023. A copy of the draft annual report of this Audit Committee is attached. A copy of the Audit Committee's Terms of Reference is included for information.

Recommendations

The Audit Committee is asked to:

- 1) Note the production of the Audit Committee Annual Report 2023/24.
- 2) Consider and approve the draft report prior to its submission to Council.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Audit Committee Annual Report for 2023/24.

Background Papers

Relevant reports presented to the Audit Committee and minutes of the meetings of the Audit Committee.

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No.

Council Approval Required

Yes.

Exempt from the Press and Public

No.

Audit Committee Annual Report 2023/24

1. Background

- 1.1 The Audit Committee is a key component of corporate governance and provides an important source of assurance about the organisation's arrangements for managing risk, maintaining an effective control environment, and reporting on financial and other performance. The committee is also responsible for approving the Statement of Accounts and the Annual Governance Statement.
- 1.2 The committee's specific powers and duties are set out in Section 9 of the Constitution under the Terms of Reference of the Audit Committee. A copy of the Terms of Reference is attached for information.
- 1.3 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) issued guidance in 2022 to local authorities to help ensure that Audit Committees are operating effectively. The guidance recommends that Audit Committees should report annually on how they have discharged their responsibilities.

2. Work Undertaken during 2023/24

- 2.1 The Audit Committee met on six occasions in the year to 31 March 2024, in accordance with its programme of work. The frequency of meetings ensures the Audit Committee can fulfil its responsibilities in an efficient and effective way.
- 2.2 During this period the committee assessed the adequacy and effectiveness of the council's governance, risk management arrangements, control environment and associated counter fraud arrangements through regular reports from officers, the internal auditors and the external auditors.
- 2.3 The committee sought assurance that action has been taken, or is otherwise planned, by management to address any risk related issues that have been identified during the period. The committee also sought to ensure that effective relationships continue to be maintained between the internal and external auditors, and between the auditors and management.
- 2.4 The specific work undertaken by the committee is set out in the report.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 This report is presented to enable the Audit Committee to fulfil its responsibility for reporting on how they have discharged their duties.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 None.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 The Audit Committee is asked to receive this report at its July 2024 meeting. Once approved, the report will be presented to Council.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 There are no direct financial or procurement implications arising from this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 None.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no direct Human Resources implications arising from this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 There are no direct implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults arising from this report.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 There are no direct Equalities and Human Rights Implications arising from this report.

11. Implications for Partners

11.1 Partners can be reassured that the Audit Committee is fulfilling its role within RMBC.

12. Risks and Mitigation

12.1 None.

13. Accountable Officer(s)

Louise Ivens, Head of Internal Audit.

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**ROTHERHAM METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT
2023/24**

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FOREWORD

Welcome to the Annual Report of the Audit Committee, which highlights the role the committee played during 2023-24 to support good governance, efficient internal control, and robust public financial reporting.

The Audit Committee is independent and oversees the audit, assurance and reporting processes that support good governance. It also has oversight of Internal and External Audit, making sure that the assurance arrangements work well.

The committee works well with officers to improve and monitor governance arrangements across the council, and to raise concerns as needed. The committee follows a diverse programme of work, obtaining annual assurance reports for oversight of arrangements, whilst also being flexible and responsive to new issues and concerns when required.

The committee members have participated with an impartial, unbiased, and neutral perspective to the committee's work and I am grateful for their contributions.

Audit Committee membership has changed significantly following the May elections. A training and development plan has been produced to support members in their new roles.

I look forward to working with members and officers of the Audit Committee during the forthcoming year, to enhance the Council's arrangements for effective governance, risk management and internal control.



Councillor Lynda Marshall Audit Committee Chair July 2024

INTRODUCTION

While there is no statutory obligation to have such an arrangement, Audit Committees are widely recognised as a core component of effective governance and therefore reflect good practice. RMBC's Audit Committee is properly constituted and as such is given sufficient authority and resources by the council. In effect, the Committee has the right to obtain all the information it considers necessary and to consult directly with senior managers. In line with best practice the Audit Committee can report its observations and concerns directly to the council.

A local authority has a duty to ensure that it is fulfilling its responsibilities for adequate and effective internal control, risk management and governance, as well as the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of its activities. The Audit Committee has a key role in overseeing and assessing the internal control, risk management and corporate governance arrangements and advising the council on the adequacy and effectiveness of those arrangements.

This role is reflected in the Committee’s Terms of Reference which are attached at Appendix C for information. During October 2022 CIPFA (the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) published ‘Audit Committees – Practical guidance for Local Authorities and Police’, an update of previous guidance from 2018. The guidance includes suggested Terms of Reference for Audit Committees. These were used as the basis for the updated Terms of Reference for the Audit Committee, which were agreed at the March 2023 Audit Committee meeting and Council on 19th July 2023 as part of the update to the Constitution.

The Audit Committee had the following membership during 2023/24:

Member	Jun 23	Aug 23	Sep 23	Nov 23	Jan 24	Mar 24
Cllr Baker-Rogers (Chair)	x	x	x	x	x	x
Cllr Browne (Vice Chair)	x	x	x	x	x	x
Cllr Ball	x					
Cllr Mills	x	x	x	x		
Cllr Wyatt	x	x	x	x	x	x
Cllr Elliott		x	x	x	x	x
Mr Barber (Independent Member)	x	x	x	x		
Ms Hutchinson (Independent Member)					x	x
Mr Olugbenga-Babalola (Independent Member)					x	x

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

There have been many benefits from the work of the committee. The main outcomes and improvements include:

- An unqualified External Audit opinion on the Council’s Statement of Accounts, confirming their accuracy and completeness
- Value for money opinion – a positive report where no areas of significant weakness were raised which recognised the council in line with most local authorities is facing a challenging landscape, but that the council is mitigating the significant risks.
- An Annual Governance Statement that reflected the developments within the council
- A positive opinion from the Head of Internal Audit’s Annual Report
- Received information from services regarding the positive steps taken following receipt of audit reports with partial opinions
- A risk management process that is embedded within the council

SUMMARY OF WORK UNDERTAKEN IN 2023/24

A summary of the reports presented to the Audit Committee is attached at Appendix A and are summarised below.

External Audit – Grant Thornton

- Received and considered the audit plan to review the financial statements.

- Received and considered the detailed results of the external auditor's work in relation to the audit of the 2022/23 financial statements of the Council. The Committee was pleased to note that the auditors had given an unqualified audit opinion.
- Received and considered the annual report detailing the Value For Money opinion for 2022/23. The report noted the improvement journey and that the council continues to work on savings programmes and effective budget setting, monitoring and controls. A small number of improvement recommendations were raised.

Internal Audit

- Continued to oversee the internal audit arrangements for the Council. This included approving the review of the Internal Audit Charter which outlines the Terms of Reference of the service and is aligned to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.
- Received and approved the Internal Audit Annual Report for 2022/23. This included the Annual Audit Opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the framework of control, risk management and governance within the Council. The Committee was pleased to receive a positive opinion.
- Received and approved the Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25. The plan ensures that internal audit resources are prioritised towards those systems and areas which are considered to be most at risk or which contribute most to the achievement of the Council's corporate objectives. It is designed to enable the Head of Internal Audit to give the opinion at the end of the year, but is flexible to ensure it remains relevant throughout the year.
- Monitored the delivery of the Internal Audit Plan for 2023/24 through regular update reports presented by the Head of Internal Audit. Reviewed variations to the audit plans which were considered necessary to reflect new or changed Council priorities.
- Received and considered the results of internal audit work performed in respect of each Directorate.
- Monitored the progress made by management during the period to address identified control weaknesses.
- Monitored the performance of the Internal Audit team through the regular update reports.

- Received and considered the implementation of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Plan for 2023 and the results of the self-assessment against Public Sector Internal Audit Standards leading to a revised plan for 2024.

Anti-Fraud and Corruption

- Received and approved updates to the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and considered the updated Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy.
- Received a self-assessment against the CIPFA Code of Practice on managing the risk of fraud and corruption.
- Received information on Internal Audit investigations that had concluded during the year.

Risk Management

- Continued to oversee the Council's risk management arrangements and strategy, including updates to the strategy and policy.
- Received a summary of risk management activity during 2022/23.
- Reviewed the progress made by the Council to identify and address corporate risks. This included consideration of the Strategic Risk Register twice during the year.
- Assessed the adequacy and effectiveness of each Directorate's risk management arrangements through consideration of the risks and mitigating actions identified in their Risk Registers. Presentations were received from Strategic Directors or their representatives on their approach to risk management.

Corporate Governance

- Considered changes to the refreshed Code of Corporate Governance prior to approval. The Code reflects the core principles and requirements of the CIPFA/SOLACE 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework'.
- Considered the draft and final Annual Governance Statement for 2022/23 on behalf of the Council, showing how the Council complied with the Code of Corporate Governance and highlighting areas of continued progress.
- Produced its own Annual Report for 2023/24 setting out the work undertaken by the committee.
- Received and considered at each meeting its own forward plan for the year ahead, ensuring that all relevant areas are covered during the year.

- The Chair of the Audit Committee and members of staff completed a self-assessment against CIPFA Guidance for Local Authority Audit Committees. This will be used to inform an ongoing training programme for members. Please see further information below.

Finance

- Considered the unaudited draft Statement of Accounts for 2022/23.
- Considered and approved the Statement of Accounts for 2022/23 on behalf of the Council.
- Received and considered a report on the final accounts closedown and accounting policies updates for 2023/24.
- Continued to review the Council's Treasury Management arrangements. This included reviewing the Annual Treasury Management Report for 2022/23 which covered the actual Prudential Indicators, and the Mid-Year Monitoring Report which included the actual and proposed treasury management activity.
- Received a report on the Dedicated School Grant, noting the additional funding received through the Department for Education's Safety Valve Programme.

Other

- Received and considered two update reports on progress made to implement recommendations arising from external audits, inspections and reviews.
- Received and considered a report on the Council's use of surveillance and acquisition of communication data powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA). There had been no usage of these powers by the Council during 2022/23.
- Received an annual report on Information Governance, including compliance with GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.
- Received a report on procurement, including information surrounding the Procurement Act 2023.
- Received updates on the actions taken by services following the issue of three partial opinion audits.

SELF ASSESSMENT EVALUATION AND TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

In March 2024, a self-assessment was carried out against checklists from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) guidance "Audit Committees / Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police 2022 Edition." The self-assessment

provides a high level review of best practice that incorporates the key principles set out in Cipfa's Position Statement and Guidance.

Where an audit committee has a high degree of performance against good practice principles, it is an indicator that the committee is soundly based and has in place a knowledgeable membership. These are the essential factors in developing an effective audit committee. The self-assessment which is undertaken on an annual basis, is used to support the planning of the Audit Committee Work Programme and Training and Development Plan.

The assessment identified the committee was operating in accordance with best practice in the majority of areas.

The last evaluation of Audit Committee Members Knowledge, Skills and Training needs was undertaken some time ago. The CIPFA 2022 guidance for Audit Committees recommends such an evaluation be carried out within a 2 year period. As the Audit Committee membership has changed significantly, an evaluation will be completed in 2024 and the results will feed into the Training and Development Plan.

Two new independent members were appointed to the Committee during the year. They received induction training covering the main role and areas of responsibility of the Committee. In addition, training or a briefing was offered before most meetings based on the papers to be presented to the Committee and the results of the previous self-assessment.

The proposed training and development plan is attached at Appendix B for discussion and comment.

Appendix A

AUDIT COMMITTEE ACTIVITY – 2023/24	June 2023	Aug 2023	Sept 2023	Nov 2023	Jan 2024	Mar 2024
Statutory business						
Statement of accounts	Draft		Update	Approval		
External Audit ISA 260 Report						
External Audit Annual Report on Value For Money						
External Audit Plan						
Annual Governance Statement	Draft		Update	Approval		
Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion						
Annual operational and specialist assurance reports						
Annual Procurement Report						
Risk Management Annual Report and Strategic Risk Register		Annual			Update	
Treasury Management Report and summary of Prudential Indicators		Outturn		Mid year		
Information Governance Annual Assurance Report						
Dedicated School Grant – Central Reserve						
Review of surveillance and use of Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act						
Independent Assurance						
Internal Audit Progress Report						

Appendix A

AUDIT COMMITTEE ACTIVITY – 2023/24	June 2023	Aug 2023	Sept 2023	Nov 2023	Jan 2024	Mar 2024
Internal Audit Plan						
External audit progress update						
Additional reports received in accordance with terms of reference						
Closure of accounts and timetable						
Asset Management - Building Security Audit Update						
Internal Audit Charter review and update						
Public Sector Internal Audit Standards – Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme						
Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy and Strategy Review and Update						
Risk Management Guide Refresh						
Code of Corporate Governance						
Audit Committee Annual Report						
External inspections, reviews and audits update						
Directorate Risk Registers ACHPH – Adult Care, Housing and Public Health ACE – Assistant Chief Executive RE – Regeneration and Environment FCS – Finance and Customer Services CYPS – Children and Young Peoples Services AM – Asset Management	ACHPH		ACE	RE	FCS	CYPS AM RE Update
Forward Plan						

Proposed Audit Committee Member Training and Development Plan 2024-25

Subject Area	Key areas of coverage	Month	Lead officer
Roles and functions of the Audit Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An understanding of the Audit Committee’s purpose and role within the governance structures • Familiarity with the committee’s terms of reference and accountability arrangements 	June Completed	Louise Ivens
Statement of Accounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of the financial statements and process leading up to Audit Committee approval following external audit 	June Completed	Rob Mahon, Natalia Govorukhina, Sarah Sweeney, Ian Bagshaw
Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principles of Risk Management • Risk Management Policy and Strategy • Role of members of the Audit Committee with regards to risk 	July	Simon Dennis/Tanya Lound
Audits, Inspections and Reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief overview of the process for tracking external inspections • The reasons why the AC tracks such inspections. 	July	Simon Dennis/Tanya Lound
Internal Audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal audit standards • Quality Assurance and Improvement Plan • Charter/Terms of Reference • Audit plan • Audit Opinion/Annual Report 	September	Louise Ivens
Counter fraud and corruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AFC Policy and Strategy • IA role 	September	Louise Ivens
Treasury Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulatory requirements • Treasury risks • Treasury management strategy • Council’s policies and procedures regarding treasury management 	November	Rob Mahon, Natalia Govorukhina, Ian Bagshaw

Appendix B

Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge of the seven principles of the CIPFA/Solace Framework 2016• Knowledge of the requirements of the Annual Governance Statement• How the principles of governance are implemented locally as set out in the local code of governance• 3 lines of defence	TBC	Simon Dennis/ Louise Ivens
External Audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audit plan• Opinion reports (Accounts, VFM)• Arrangements for the appointment of auditors and quality monitoring undertaken	TBC	This will be organised separately by Grant Thornton and will be run in conjunction with other local authorities

TERMS OF REFERENCE 2023/24

Committee Size

To be comprised of:-

- Five Councillors, none of which are members of the Cabinet.
- Two people who are not councillors or officers of the Council (independent members).

Statement of purpose

- 1 The Committee's purpose is to provide an independent and high-level focus on the adequacy of governance, risk and control arrangements. Its role in ensuring there is sufficient assurance over governance, risk and control gives greater confidence to the Council that those arrangements are effective.
- 2 The Committee has oversight of both internal and external audit, together with the financial and governance reports, helping to ensure there are adequate arrangements in place for both internal challenge and public accountability.

Governance, risk and control

- 3 To review the Council's corporate governance arrangements against the Good Governance Framework, including the ethical framework and consider RMBC's Code of Governance.
- 4 To monitor the effective development and operation of risk management in the Council
- 5 To monitor progress in addressing risk-related issues reported to the Committee.
- 6 To review risk registers and consider their adequacy and effectiveness in capturing and assessing risks and completing mitigating actions.
- 7 To consider reports on the effectiveness of internal controls and monitor the implementation of agreed actions.
- 8 To consider reports on the effectiveness of financial management arrangements, including compliance with CIPFA's Financial Management Code.
- 9 To consider the Council's arrangements to secure value for money and review assurances and assessments on the effectiveness of these arrangements.
- 10 To review the assessment of fraud risks and potential harm to the Council from fraud and corruption.
- 11 To monitor the Counter-Fraud Strategy, actions and resources.
- 12 To review the governance and assurance arrangements for significant partnerships or collaborations.
- 13 To deal with any matters referred to the Committee by the Statutory Officers.

Governance Reporting

- 14 To review the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) prior to approval and consider whether it properly reflects the risk environment and supporting assurances, taking into account Internal Audit's opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's Framework of Governance, risk management and control.
- 15 To consider whether the annual evaluation for the AGS fairly concludes that governance arrangements are fit for purpose, supporting the achievement of the Authority's objectives.
- 16 To approve the final AGS for publication.

Financial Reporting

- 17 To monitor the arrangements and preparations for financial reporting to ensure that statutory requirements and professional standards can be met.
- 18 To review the draft annual Statement of Accounts following approval by the s151 Officer. Specifically, to consider whether appropriate accounting policies have been followed.
- 19 To approve the final audited annual Statement of Accounts for publication. Specifically, to consider whether there are concerns arising from the financial statements or from the audit that need to be brought to the attention of the council.
- 20 To consider the external auditor's report to those charged with governance on issues arising from the audit of the accounts.

Arrangements for Audit an Assurance

- 21 To consider the Council's framework of assurance and ensure that it adequately addresses the risks and priorities of the Council.
- 22 To consider reports on progress against actions from external inspections and audits.

External audit

- 23 To support the independence of external audit through consideration of the external auditor's annual assessment of its independence and review of any issues raised by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA).
- 24 To approve the external auditor's annual plan.
- 25 To approve any revisions to the external auditor's plan.
- 26 To consider the external auditor's annual letter, relevant reports and the report to those charged with governance.
- 27 To consider specific reports as agreed with the external auditor.
- 28 To comment on the scope and depth of external audit work and to ensure it gives value for money.
- 29 To consider additional commissions of work from external audit.

- 30 To advise and recommend on the effectiveness of relationships between external and internal audit and other inspection agencies or relevant bodies
- 31 To provide free and unfettered access to the Audit Committee Chair for the auditors, including the opportunity for a private meeting with the Committee.

Internal Audit

- 32 To approve the Internal Audit Charter.
- 33 To approve the risk-based Internal Audit plan, including Internal Audit's resource requirements, the approach to using other sources of assurance and any work required to place reliance upon those other sources.
- 34 To approve significant interim changes to the risk-based Internal Audit plan and resource requirements.
- 35 To make appropriate enquiries of both management and the Head of Internal Audit to determine if there are any inappropriate scope or resource limitations.
- 36 To consider any impairments to independence or objectivity arising from additional roles or responsibilities outside of internal auditing and to approve and periodically review safeguards to limit such impairments.
- 37 To approve the internal or external assessments of Internal Audit against Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.
- 38 To consider reports from the Head of Internal Audit on Internal Audit's performance during the year. These will include:-
 - updates on the work of Internal Audit including progress against the plan; key findings and issues of concern; action in hand as a result of Internal Audit work; and performance indicators.
 - regular reports on the results of Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme.
 - reports on instances where the Internal Audit function does not conform to the PSIAS and LGAN, considering whether the non-conformance is significant enough that it must be included in the AGS
- 39 To approve the Head of Internal Audit's annual report including:-
 - The statement of the level of conformance with the PSIAS and LGAN and the results of the QAIP that support the statement.
 - The opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control together with the summary of the work supporting the opinion.
- 40 To consider summaries of specific Internal Audit reports.
- 41 To receive reports outlining the action taken where the Head of Internal Audit has concluded that management has accepted a level of risk that may be unacceptable to the authority or there are concerns about progress with the implementation of agreed actions.
- 42 To contribute to the QAIP and in particular, to the External Quality Assessment of Internal Audit that takes place at least once every five years.
- 43 To provide free and unfettered access to the Audit Committee Chair for the Head of Internal Audit, including the opportunity for him/her to meet privately with the committee.

Treasury Management

- 44 To review Treasury Management Policy, Strategy and procedures and to be satisfied that controls are satisfactory
- 45 To receive annual reports on Treasury Management, specifically the outturn report and the mid-year report
- 46 To review the treasury risk profile and adequacy of treasury risk management processes
- 47 To review assurances on Treasury Management, for example an Internal Audit report, external audit report or other review.

Accountability arrangements

- 48 To report to those charged with governance on the Committee's findings, conclusions and recommendations concerning the adequacy and effectiveness of their governance, risk management and internal control frameworks, financial reporting arrangements, and internal and external audit functions.
- 49 To report to full council on a regular basis on the Committee's performance in relation to the terms of reference and the effectiveness of the Committee in meeting its purpose.
- 50 To submit a report on the work of the Committee to the Council on an annual basis, including a conclusion on compliance with the CIPFA Position Statement on Audit Committees.