

**Minutes of the Audit Committee
Thursday 26th June, 2025 at 6.00pm
In Committee Room 3, The Council House, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor B Collins (Chair)
Councillor A Qayyum (Vice-Chair)
Councillors K Archer, H Bills, K Denning, P Dobb, L Johnson, K Razzaq
and J Thorne; T Beirne (Independent Member)

Also in Attendance

Councillor E Lawrence (Cabinet Member for Transformation) – item 11

Dudley MBC Officers:

C Heaphy (Interim Director of Finance - Section 151 Officer), C Williams (Interim Head of Finance), I Grosvenor (Finance Manager), M Wilcox (Principal Lawyer - Deputy Monitoring Officer), G SinghAulakh (Head of Technology Systems and Services) and S Griffiths (Democratic Services Manager)

1 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors S Ali, J Cowell and T Creed.

2 **Appointment of Substitute Members**

Councillors K Archer, H Bills and K Razzaq had been appointed as Substitute Members for Councillors S Ali, J Cowell and T Creed, respectively, for this meeting of the Committee only.

The Committee agreed to invite Shadow Cabinet Members to attend meetings of the Committee to which Cabinet Members were invited.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

No Member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Member's Code of Conduct.

4 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting of the former Audit and Standards Committee held on 7th May, 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed.

5 **Audit Committee Progress Tracker**

The Progress Tracker was received by the Committee.

Resolved

That the information contained in the progress tracker be noted.

6 **Statement of Accounts 2024-25**

The Committee received a report of the Interim Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) on the Statement of Accounts 2024-25. The Statement of Accounts, and the audit of them, were the main formal and public report on the financial standing of the authority.

There was a statutory requirement for the Council to publish draft accounts for the 2024/25 financial year by 30th June, 2025. There was also a requirement for the Statement of Accounts to be audited and published by 27th February, 2026. The draft Statement of Accounts for the 2024-25 financial year were presented to the Committee for consideration and endorsement prior to publication.

The final audited statement of accounts would include any adjustments to the draft accounts and reported to the Audit Committee for approval upon completion of the audit. These accounts were prepared under International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) as adopted for local authorities by the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

The Interim Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) gave a detailed presentation to the Committee on the content of the report and the Statement of Accounts.

The Interim Director of Finance gave assurances concerning the organisational capacity to deliver on the work required in connection with the Statement of Accounts, ongoing improvements to working practices and the progress of measures to strengthen the management of the Council's finances and the level of reserves. Reference was also made to the position concerning the Council's investments. The Interim Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) gave an overview of the Annual Governance Statement as referred to in Minute No. 7 below.

Reference was made to how improvements and efficiencies would be measured at a service user level; the need to make links to the Council's Improvement Plan and ensure that the documents were accessible to the general public. The Interim Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) referred to assurance measures through the performance management framework and links to the Council's scrutiny arrangements.

Resolved

- (1) That the Statement of Accounts be endorsed.
- (2) That the Interim Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer), in consultation with the Chair of the Audit Committee, be authorised to approve any changes to the Statement of Accounts arising from audit work undertaken after this meeting, subject to there being no impact on usable reserves at 31st March, 2025.

7 Annual Governance Statement

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) on the Council's draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2024/25 which was required to be included as part of the annual Statement of Accounts.

The draft Statement of Accounts (unaudited), including the Annual Governance Statement, was required to be published for consultation purposes by 30th June, 2025.

The AGS detailed how the Council complied with its local Code of Corporate Governance, the effectiveness of its governance framework and described any significant governance issues and how they would be addressed.

Resolved

That the draft Annual Governance Statement be approved for publication with the Statement of Accounts.

8 Audit Committee Work Plan 2025/25

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) on the proposed work plan setting out a schedule of agenda items for consideration by the Audit Committee during the 2025/26 municipal year. Reference was made to the need for flexibility in the work plan during the municipal year.

Regarding Internal Audit Minimal and Limited Assurance Reports, it was noted that the relevant Director, Heads of Service and Cabinet/Shadow Cabinet Members would be invited to attend the Committee as and when appropriate.

Resolved

That the work plan and proposed schedule of agenda items for the 2025/26 municipal year be approved.

9 Questions Under Council Procedure Rule 11.8

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

10 Exclusion of the Public and Press

Resolved

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 7 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.

11 **Cyber Security Update**

The Committee considered a report on proposals to significantly enhance the existing understanding within the Council of the evolving cybersecurity threat landscape, the controls currently in place, identified exceptions, and the planned activities designed to strengthen the Council's overall cyber posture. The Head of Technology Systems and Services gave a presentation to the Committee on the report and recommendations.

The Committee stressed the importance of mandatory training for all employees and elected Members. Monitoring information on completed training was compiled, and this would be supplied to the political group whips in relation to elected Members. A drop-in surgery/workshop would be organised to further assist Members. The Committee also referred to the need to firmly embed the approach to cyber security, including future induction programmes and by signing up to the cyber security charter. The Head of Technology Systems and Services undertook to recirculate the appropriate links to Members.

The implementation of the recommendations in the report would be rolled out according to a prioritised timetable and the importance of communications was recognised. The Chair requested that a further progress update be given to the Committee in December, 2025.

Resolved

- (1) That the recommendations in the report be approved.
- (2) That a further progress report be submitted to the Committee in December, 2025.

The meeting ended at 7.20 pm

CHAIR