

No.

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Hybrid meeting held on 24th March, 2025.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The recording of the meeting is available [here](#).

Present: G. Chapman (Chair and Lay Member); N. Ireland (Vice-Chair and Lay Member); Councillors P. Drake, E. Goodjohn, M.J. Hooper, J.M. Norman, J. Protheroe and M. Evans (Lay Member).

Also present: Councillor G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing).

ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Chair read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing”.

APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE –

This was received from Councillor N.J. Wood.

MINUTES –

RESOLVED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 17th February, 2025 be approved as a correct record.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

RESHAPING SCRUTINY (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 6th March, 2025 as contained within the agenda was presented by the Operational Manager Democratic Services.

Councillor M. Hooper stated that a core issue was those members on Scrutiny who did not actively engage or participate, and it was important to find ways to improve that. There was also a concern regarding Scrutiny driving policy changes in a situation when there was one political group that led the Council as well as the Welsh and UK’s Governments, so that would be challenging for opposition Members.

No.

Councillor E. Goodjohn queried the splitting the responsibility of Social Services over to two separate Scrutiny Committees, with the Start Well Scrutiny Committee potentially being accountable for over half of the Council's budget. In addition, Councillor Goodjohn queried whether responding to the climate emergency sat best under the Place Scrutiny Committee as that impacted a range of policy areas and needed to be considered among other areas such as financial management and procurement.

Councillor Goodjohn also queried whether there could be cross Committee working on Task and Finish reviews. In reply, the Director of Corporate Resources confirmed that cross working would be reflected in the proposals.

Councillor J. Protheroe commented that it was logical to align the Scrutiny Committees to the objectives within the new Corporate Plan which would be understandable to residents. It was recognised that a significant number of reports to Scrutiny had been for noting which had meant that many Committee Members had not been able to fully focus on tasks at hand and the ability to provide ideas and recommendations of practical use. Therefore, removing reports for noting would free up time and help refocus Committee Members. Councillor Protheroe added that she hoped that all Committee Members would do what was best for residents and work in a constructive and co-operative way.

M. Evans referred to paragraph 2.11 of the report and feedback received from a range of Members to date that had led to a multitude of opinions, and he stated that it would have been useful to see the feedback and other alternative options considered. In response, the Director advised that the approach that had been adopted had been to involve and engage with Elected Members early on in the process. That began in the Autumn of 2024 when there had been initial discussions around developing the performance management framework and that had led to a wider set of proposed changes. During each briefing session there had been opportunity to reflect on previous points raised and discussed and then refine on those points, such as the frequency of meetings, different combinations of meetings and the capacity of the officer core. That could be made clearer.

It was agreed that information regarding the number of Call-Ins to Scrutiny would be circulated to Members.

Councillor Goodjohn queried how the proposal to create a performance forum had come about and how would meetings be structured. In response, the Director clarified that performance forums were used by other Local Authorities and the idea was based on refining the level performance information scrutinised by Members and moving to more investigative task and finish review work. As the new Corporate Plan (Vale 2030) was cross cutting, the idea of the forum was to bring Members together twice a year so that they could look at performance from a variety of perspectives. It would also assist Members to identify areas that required further consideration by their specific Scrutiny Committee. The actual logistical elements of the forum were due to be considered once all the feedback of the current phase had been collated. The first meeting of the forum was planned to take place by September.

No.

Councillor Hooper queried the make-up and Member selection process for Task and Finish Review groups. The Director stated that in terms of political balance there had been consideration about the Chair and Vice-Chair of each Scrutiny Committee discussing with Committee Members at the start of each year, their skills, experiences and areas of interest, and also potential topics for Task and Finish. That would allow opportunity to consider the best blend of skills required. It was also important to ensure that all Members had opportunities to contribute and participate. The Operational Manager added that there was an aim to formally record the skills and expertise of all Elected Members to better understand the make-up of Councillors. In terms of Task and Finish Groups, they would range from 4 to 8 Members, with 6 being the ideal number, appointed on the basis of political balance if possible, but the Scrutiny Committee would have discretion in terms of size and membership.

Councillor Hooper queried how would the Task and Finish Groups be managed. The Operational Manager stated that the process would be facilitated and managed by Democratic Officers in conjunction with the Chair. The aim was to have a structured review underpinned by a clear and well-defined scope and framework that would assist short and sharp Task and Finish reviews. Appropriate training around researching and scoping had been earmarked for Democratic Officers.

G. Chapman (Chair) referred to paragraph 2.29 and feedback and queried whether proposals in 2.8 were illustrative and not fixed and were they over optimistic given that they would be implemented by June. Therefore, to have meaningful engagement all Members needed to be consulted. In response, the Director confirmed that there had already been briefing and engagement sessions on the 12th and 13th March with Members, so all had had an opportunity to hear proposals and provide feedback. As it was recognised that all Members would be able to attend, a series of day time drop-in sessions had been held by Democratic Services to either brief Members on proposals or respond to queries that other Members may have. In addition, the proposals had been reported to the Council's Democratic Services and were also to be presented to the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee. The aim was to provide a further report to Cabinet on 3rd April based on feedback received, with any proposals agreed by Cabinet to then be referred to Full Council towards the end of April. Implementation of the new Scrutiny arrangements would then take place in May following the Annual Meeting.

Councillor Goodjohn commented that the changes to Scrutiny should be welcomed and he added that the pace of reporting as seen during these proposals should be the norm.

G. Chapman stated that there were a number of key points to report back to Cabinet:

- For those Members that sat on a Scrutiny Committee they needed to fully understand the role of Scrutiny and how they could participate within the Scrutiny function;
- Adequate training should be provided to Members on Scrutiny and the development of a quick training programme for Members prior to implementation of the new Scrutiny function would be endorsed;

No.

- Questioning skills for Members was an important part of any training programme;
- It was important to ensure that there was a budget to facilitate the use of expert witnesses;
- The Governance and Audit Committee should have sight of the outcome of any review undertaken following the introduction of the new Scrutiny function which should also be presented to Cabinet; and
- It was important for the Scrutiny Committees' Forward Work Programmes to also have regard to possible referrals from the Governance and Audit Committee that requested Scrutiny to look at some service aspect in more detail.

Subsequently it was

RESOLVED – T H A T the comments of the Governance and Audit Committee be reported to Cabinet. The comments relating to the following:

- For those Members that sat on a Scrutiny Committee they needed to fully understand the role of Scrutiny and how they could participate within the Scrutiny function;
- It was important to ensure that adequate training was provided to Members on Scrutiny and the development of a quick training programme for Members prior to implementation of the new Scrutiny function would be endorsed;
- An important element of the training programme was questioning skills;
- With regard to the use of expert witnesses at Scrutiny Committees, it was important to ensure that there was a budget to facilitate that;
- The Governance and Audit Committee to have sight of the outcome of any review undertaken following the introduction of the new Scrutiny function which should also be presented to Cabinet; and
- It was important for the Scrutiny Committees' Forward Work Programmes to also have regard to possible referrals from the Governance and Audit Committee that requested Scrutiny to look at some service aspect in more detail.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

AUDIT WALES RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNANCE OF THE PLANNING SERVICE-PLANNING PROTOCOL, PLANNING COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE, AND AMENDED SCHEME OF DELEGATION (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 6th March, 2025 as contained within the agenda was presented by the Head of Sustainable Development.

Councillor E. Goodjohn queried whether the Protocol was a public facing document as it was not the easiest of reads for members of the public. He suggested that certain elements of the Protocol could be shortened such as the section on

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declarations. He also added that he was not sure whether the first 3 pages would be of relevance to the public. In reply, the Head of Sustainable Development stated that there was a balance as the Protocol was also meant for agents, applicants as well as Elected Members. Therefore, there was a wide audience for which it would be difficult to cover all aspects with a small document. The Head of Sustainable Development agreed to reflect on the Councillors' comments.

Councillor J. Protheroe referred to Planning application search function and queried whether that could be made more user friendly. The Head of Sustainable Development agreed for that to be looked at, as well the signposting of Planning services on the website.

The Chair, G. Chapman, raised a series of points for consideration in regard to Appendix B (Planning Protocol):

- Paragraph 5.9 - clarity regarding the type of interest being referred to was it pecuniary, prejudicial or personal;
- Paragraph 5.11 - clarity as to whether an Elected Member could take part in a debate if they had pre-determined an application;
- Paragraph 6.4 - inclusion of the full name of the 2011 Act that was being referred to;
- Throughout the Protocol officers referred to should be defined;
- The inclusion of a Glossary of Terms;
- Consistency with referring to Elected Members and using one specific title;
- Paragraph 7.2 – clarification regarding the legitimacy of allowing Vale of Glamorgan Elected Members 5 minutes speaking time, against public speakers being allowed 3 minutes speaking time;
- Paragraphs 9.7 and 9.8 and clarification as to whether it was legitimate for Elected Members with a personal or prejudicial interest to be able to speak at a Planning Committee meeting;
- Paragraph 11.1 required capitalisation of the letter P for the term Planning Officer;
- Paragraphs 14.2 to 14.8 regarding site visits were repetitive and just including paragraph 14.7 provided sufficient detail;
- Should members of the public be invited to site visits and there should be further regard to who could speak;
- Paragraph 20.1 – title Head of the Planning Service to be amended to Head of Sustainable Development.

With regard to the Terms of Reference (Appendix C), the Chair queried paragraph 1.7 limits meetings of Planning Committees to 4 hours, was that fair and reasonable and was it too much.

For the Scheme of Delegation at Appendix D, the Chair referred to paragraph 1.2 and stated that there should be a definition of who were the 'other nominated officers'. In addition, in paragraph 3.1e there was a missing capital letter P for the title Principal Planning Officer and for paragraph 8.1 there needed to be further definition of who the authorising officers were.

No.

Councillor E. Goodjohn stated that not all the issues highlighted were because of the Planning process, for example the length of meetings would have come out of a survey of Members around what they judged as a reasonable length of time. In terms of twin hatted Members who sat on the Vale of Glamorgan Council and either a Town or Community Council and which would have previously considered an application, Members had been declaring at meetings that they would be looking at the matters from afresh. In addition, there was an understanding that Members with a prejudicial interest were still able to speak at Committee meetings where members of the public also had a right to speak, but they would have to leave the meeting once they had spoken.

There being no further comments, it was

RESOLVED – T H A T the changes proposed, and points of clarification raised by the Governance and Audit Committee be referred back to Cabinet for its consideration prior to reporting to Full Council.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

CORPORATE RISK: QUARTER 3 UPDATE (DCR) –

The report provided Members with an overview of the Corporate Risk Register for Quarter 3 (April 2024-December 2024). The report also reflected the Strategic Leadership Team's (SLT) consideration of the recommendations made by this Committee following the Quarter 2 period relating to several of the risks contained within the Corporate Risk Register.

The Corporate Risk Register had a total of twelve identified risks with one risk scoring very high, four risks scoring high, four risks scoring medium/high, and three risks scoring medium.

Councillor M. Hooper referred to the Council's financial resources and the possible impact of the Chancellor's Spring Statement. Given the likely reduction in budgets and impacts from 15 years of austerity and Covid-19, it was important to highlight the direction of travel and increased risks on financial resources. In addition, Councillor Hooper stated that it was also important to highlight the expected delays to Barry Regeneration/Making Waves project as it was reported at the meeting Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee that there was a two year delay.

Furthermore, and as referred to in the report, the Committee agreed to highlight to Cabinet increased risk and direction of travel for the following risks:

- Additional Learning Needs;
- Information and Cyber Security Risk;
- Climate Change and Nature Emergency Risk;
- Social Care Demand and Capacity Risk; and
- The Physical Assets Risk.

No.

With regard to Additional Learning Needs, the Committee agreed to invite the relevant Scrutiny Committee to consider undertaking a deep dive investigation (Task and Finish review) into that area of risk.

Subsequently, it was

RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T the Strategic Leadership Team's consideration of the response to Cabinet's resolution following their consideration of the Governance and Audit Committee's referred comments (Annex B) be noted.

(2) T H A T the Quarter 3 position of corporate risks (April 2024 – December 2024) outlined in the Risk Summary Report (Annex A) be noted.

(3) T H A T Cabinet be advised of the views of the Governance and Audit Committee in that it should be aware of the increased risk and direction of travel for the following risks:

- Additional Learning Needs;
- Information and Cyber Security Risk;
- Climate Change and Nature Emergency Risk;
- Social Care Demand and Capacity Risk; and
- The Physical Assets Risk.

(4) T H A T Cabinet be advised of the concern of heightened risks in relation to the Financial Resources and the Barry Regeneration/Making Waves project, and that the Strategic Leadership Team be requested to consider these risks in detail.

(5) T H A T the relevant Scrutiny Committee be invited to consider undertaking a deep dive investigation / Task and Finish review into the Additional Learning Needs Risk.

Reasons for decisions

(1-4) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

(5) In order to request the relevant Scrutiny Committee to investigate the issues affecting the Additional Learning Needs Risk.

Q3 UPDATE: AUDIT WALES WORK PROGRAMME 2024 – VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL (DCR) –

The report presented to Members the Q3 update of Audit Wales's Work Programme and Appendix A outlined Q3 progress on Audit Wales's Work Programme and timetable as aligned to the Vale of Glamorgan Annual Audit Plan 2024.

No.

Governance and Audit Committee Members were requested to review and note the progress made on the Vale of Glamorgan Audit Work Programme at Q3 and, following consideration, to refer the report to Cabinet for their oversight.

Having considered the report it was

RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T the report be referred to Cabinet for its oversight.

Reasons for decisions

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) To enable Cabinet's oversight of the Audit Programme.

REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS FOR JOINT COMMITTEE MEETINGS (DCR) –

At its meeting held on 18th November, 2024, the Governance and Audit Committee requested information outlining where reports and minutes of joint committees were reported to.

The information provided in the report had been collated by Democratic Services and provided a summary for the following joint bodies of which the Vale of Glamorgan were formal members:

- Central South Consortium - Joint Education Service Joint Committee;
- Cardiff Capital Region City Deal;
- Shared Regulatory Services Joint Committee;
- National Joint Committee for the National Adoption Service and Foster Wales;
- Prosiect Gwyrdd Joint Committee;
- Coychurch Crematorium Joint Committee;
- Glamorgan Archives Joint Committee.

The Committee was recommended to note the contents of the report and make comments, as appropriate.

In considering the report and as the Joint Committees were strategic bodies, the Committee agreed for a further report to be presented in June, to provide further clarification regarding where minutes of meetings were reported to. It was also agreed for information relating to governance arrangements for each Joint Committee to be provided as part of the further report.

The Committee

No.

RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T a further report on the matter be presented to the Governance and Audit Committee at its meeting on 23rd June, 2025.

Reason for decisions

(1&2) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

GLOBAL INTERNAL AUDIT STANDARDS (HRIAS) –

The Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS) replaced the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and became effective in the public sector in the UK on 1st April, 2025.

All reference to the Standards within Internal Audit documentation would need to be updated.

The Standards have 5 Domains, 15 Principles and 52 Standards

The key changes were:

- A ‘mandate’ for internal audit; in local government, internal audit’s primary mandate came from statutory regulations;
- An internal audit strategy;
- Professional courage and professional scepticism;
- Internal Audit plans supported the achievement of an organisation’s objectives.

Having considered the report and presentation contained at Appendix A, the Committee

RESOLVED – T H A T the contents of the report and the presentation attached at Appendix A be noted.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

PROGRESS AGAINST THE INTERNAL AUDIT RISK BASED PLAN (HRIAS) –

The progress made against the Internal Audit Plan as of 28th February, 2025 was detailed in Appendix A to the report and summarised in Appendix B to the report. It showed that 40 planned audit reviews had been completed which equated to a completion rate of 61%.

No.

There were 19 audits in progress, and it was anticipated that the majority of these would be completed to at least draft stage by the year end. Therefore there would be sufficient coverage to provide an overall audit opinion.

Audit opinions, based on the assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the areas examined through testing of the effectiveness of the internal control environment, had been given to 39 of the 40 completed audits. 36 audits (92%) had been given *Substantial* or *Reasonable Assurance*, and 3 audits had been given *Limited Assurance*.

The ICT Business Continuity Follow Up audit had received 2 consecutive *Limited Assurance* audit opinions.

Included within the 2024/25 Plan were 14 audits that had not been undertaken or completed in 2023/24. Appendix C to the report showed the status of these audits with 13 having been completed.

A total of 146 recommendations had been made to date to improve the control environment. The progress being made in implementing the high (6%) and medium (43%) priority recommendations was regularly monitored by the Audit team and reported to this Committee.

Councillor M. Hooper queried the reasons for a delay of the review into hybrid meetings of the Council. The Head of Regional Internal Audit Service clarified that it had been deferred following discussion with the Operational Manager as it was considered beneficial to undertake a review following implementation of the possible new Scrutiny arrangements. The Director of Corporate Resources added that the Governance and Audit Committee would be made aware of when any further report on the restructuring of the Scrutiny function was available.

Further to the review into hybrid meetings, Councillor E. Goodjohn queried whether the scope of that review related to the effectiveness of hybrid meetings or to the system used to facilitate meetings. The Head of Regional Internal Audit Service advised that the full scope was to be determined but it would consider the effectiveness of such meetings.

With regard to why the review pertaining to the Local Authority Trading Company had been deferred, the Head of Regional Internal Audit Service advised a report was recently considered by the Strategic Leadership Team and due to the complex nature of the work, it was determined necessary to have a consultant on board. It was also clarified that progress on outstanding recommendations were monitored to obtain a level of assurance, but a formal review would not begin until all recommendations had been implemented.

Subsequently it was

RESOLVED – T H A T the contents of the report and the progress made against the Internal Audit Risk Based Plan 2024/25 be noted.

No.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

RECOMMENDATION MONITORING (HRIAS) –

The report provided Members of the Governance and Audit Committee with a position statement on internal audit recommendations that had been made to identify those that had been implemented and those that were overdue.

A position statement in respect of internal audit high and medium priority recommendations made, implemented and overdue as of 28th February, 2025 was detailed in Appendix A to the report.

A recommendation was made to enhance an identified weakness in a control to mitigate the identified risk, so until the recommendation was implemented the risk remained.

To date 9 high and 63 medium priority recommendations had been made following the conclusion of audits from this year's annual plan. All had been agreed.

There were currently no overdue recommendations.

At the request of the Governance and Audit Committee, the relevant Chief Officer had been invited to Committee to provide assurances that action was being taken to implement the agreed recommendations in respect of the Ysgol Y Deri and St Cyres Building Compliance Follow Up audit. Assurance had been provided that work was ongoing to mitigate the identified risks and a revised timescale for implementation had been agreed.

There were also 2 recommendations made in an audit completed in 2022-23 which had future implementation dates. The details of these were in Appendix B to the report.

The monitoring of recommendations was undertaken regularly by the Audit team and any undue delays or issues were highlighted to Senior Management and ultimately this Committee.

With regard to the Ysgol Y Deri and St Cyres Building Compliance Follow Up, the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources had provided written assurance that a date for May had been scheduled for completion of the recommendation and outstanding actions.

Subsequently, it was

RESOLVED – T H A T the position statement on internal audit recommendations made, implemented and outstanding as at 28th February, 2025 be noted.

No.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2025/26 (HRIAS) –

The Governance and Audit Committee had several core functions and responsibilities within its remit. It received reports and presentations throughout the year to enable it to carry out those core functions and responsibilities effectively and to provide it with confidence in the financial governance of the Authority.

To enable the Committee to provide this assurance and to ensure it was covering its range of responsibilities, a Forward Work Programme (FWP) was presented at each meeting, setting out the reports to be presented at future meetings, for approval or amendment, as necessary.

The FWP for 2025/26 had been produced and was attached at Appendix A to the report.

It was noted that the update on the Cardiff Region City Deal would be on an annual basis and that there would be a report from the Monitoring Officer regarding joint committee meeting reporting arrangements. In addition, there would be consideration of inclusion of a Quarterly Action tracking report, previously requested by Committee.

RESOLVED – T H A T the schedule of items for the next meeting on 25th June, 2025 be endorsed subject to it being noted that the update on the Cardiff Region City Deal would be on an annual basis and that there would be a report from the Monitoring Officer regarding joint committee meeting reporting arrangements.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC –

RESOLVED – T H A T under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public 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 Part 4 of Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Act, the relevant paragraphs of the Schedule being referred to in brackets after the minute heading.

ICT BUSINESS CONTINUITY LIMITED ASSURANCE AUDIT REPORT
(HRIAS) (EXEMPT INFORMATION – PARAGRAPH 14) –

An Internal Audit report on ICT Business Continuity Planning was previously issued in May 2023 with a *Limited Assurance* opinion.

No.

A follow up audit had recently been concluded and although some improvements had been made a *Limited Assurance* opinion was given again due to the issues identified.

As per internal audit procedures, Governance and Audit Committee were recommended to invite the relevant Chief Officer in to provide the necessary assurances that action would be taken to address the issues identified within the audit report when consecutive Limited Assurance opinions were given to an audit.

As the subject matter was sensitive and included potential security issues a summary of the key issues was provided within the report under Part II.

All recommendations made had been agreed and their implementation would be monitored to ensure the agreed timescales were met. Any delay would be highlighted to the Governance and Audit Committee as per internal audit procedures.

Having considered the report and raising several queries and comments, the Governance and Audit Committee

RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the report and progress made be noted.
- (2) T H A T a further update report be presented to the Committee at its meeting schedule for 15th September, 2025.

Reason for decisions

- (1&2) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.