



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Governance & Audit Committee**

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Tuesday, 12 October 2021 at 2.00 pm

Present: Paula O'Connor (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

C Anderson
T J Hennegan
M B Lewis
J A Raynor

Councillor(s)

P M Black
P R Hood-Williams
C E Lloyd
L V Walton

Councillor(s)

D W Helliwell
J W Jones
S Pritchard
T M White

Lay Member

Julie Davies

Also Present

Councillor R C Stewart – Leader of the Council

Councillor R V Smith – Cabinet Member for Education, Improvement, Learning & Skills

Officer(s)

Adrian Chard

Strategic Human Resources and Organisational
Development Manager

Simon Cockings

Chief Auditor

Adam Hill

Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Resources

Chris Howell

Head of Waste Management

Tracey Meredith

Chief Legal Officer / Monitoring Officer

Jeremy Parkhouse

Democratic Services Officer

Brian Roles

Head of Education Planning and Resources

Ben Smith

Chief Finance Officer / Section 151 Officer

Also Present

Jason Garcia

Audit Wales

Apologies for Absence

Councillor O G James

36 **Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, the following interests were declared: -

Councillors P M Black, D W Helliwell, P R Hood-Williams, J W Jones, S Pritchard,

J A Raynor, L V Walton and T M White declared personal interests as school governors in Minute No.38 – Employment of Agency Staff Audit Report 2019/20 – Update.

37 Minutes.

Resolved that the Minutes of the Governance & Audit Committee meetings held on 24 August and 14 September 2021 be approved as a correct record.

38 Employment of Agency Staff Audit Report 2019/20 - 2021 Update. (Adrian Chard)

Adrian Chard, Strategic Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager, supported by Chris Howell, Head of Waste, Parks & Cleansing and Brian Roles, Head of Education Planning and Resources presented a 'for information' report on the actions arising from the Employment of Agency Staff Audit report.

Further to the report made to the Committee in June 2021, a progress update on a number of areas was provided, including the total number of Agency Workers engaged through the corporate contracted agencies (Staffline and RSD Social Care).

It was added that the total spend / cost of Agency Workers for 2020/21 was £4,300,381. The largest total spend this year was with Staffline (circa £1.57 million) and RSD (circa £98,000). The figures provided also included provision for consultancy work, primarily in Social Services and the provision of the Welsh Government Social Care Bonus. It was explained that further analysis of these costs had identified small numbers of agency workers engaged via non-corporate contracted agencies.

The report updated the Committee on compliance, Social Services, Place and Education Directorate's feedback.

The Committee discussed the following in respect of Waste: -

- Staff support, particularly arrangements for staff returning to work from long periods of sickness;
- The daily pressures faced in the Waste, including the impact upon the service when a crew is absent and the need to employ agency workers as replacements to ensure service provision;
- The number of traineeships employed in Waste, how they are the main route to employment within Waste and the proposals to fill 30 additional posts in the service;
- How agency workers are employed during fluctuating periods of the work load, how seasonal contracts had not been very successful and the most effective method was to employ established agency workers;
- Previous investigations into establishing an internal jobs bank within the Authority and the practical problems / additional costs which would have to be overcome if a bank was established;
- The assurance provided by the report and the challenge to make future improvements;

- How the physically demanding nature of the roles within Waste meant that staff from other areas e.g. Cleansing, would find the roles too physically demanding;
- The training being provided to crews and the organising of a reserve list to ensure service provision;
- The critical nature of Waste and the continuous need for the service to be fluid, how sickness within the service had a direct affect upon residents and the huge progress made in Waste.

Councillor R C Stewart, Leader of the Council highlighted the extraordinary effort to maintain the service throughout the Covid 19 Pandemic and the continued pressures / impacts of the service provision. He referred to the fact that there had been a significant downward trend in the use of agency workers by Waste due to the Authority's policy of employing people, whilst also recognising that the service had to rely upon agency workers to maintain services.

The Committee discussed the following in respect of Education: -

- Using percentage figures in future to provide a realistic picture;
- Agency worker provision within schools and outside schools, e.g. Pupil Referral Unit, Additional Learning Needs Support, Home Tuition and Cleaning Services;
- The continued focus upon management within Education and how schools manage their own arrangements to employ qualified supply teachers to meet the needs of individual schools;
- The advantages of the supply agency framework;
- The difficulty in providing accurate agency workers figures from all the schools in the Authority and the assurance provided by having over 93% of schools using the framework;
- The total delegated schools budget of £167 million, the vast bulk of which was for staffing costs;
- The importance of the role of school governing bodies, ensuring value for money and the assurance provided by the Internal Audit / Scrutiny process.

Councillor R V Smith, Cabinet Member for Education, Improvement, Learning and Skills emphasised that the provision of agency workers as cover was a matter for each school. He added that the use of agency workers had changed and was still evolving and made reference to the up-skilling of individuals in schools to provide cover. He emphasised the need to ensure that staff were not removed from their duties to provide cover and highlighted the continued need to provide a professional service at all times.

The Chair commented that it was the aim of the Authority to reduce the overall numbers of agency workers used and highlighted the importance of management effectively managing sickness absence as a means to achieving this aim.

She added that Estyn inspections provided assurances in respect of schools. However, the suspension of these checks due to Covid 19 was the reason why additional assurance was being sought and emphasised the need to drive down agency worker numbers whilst recognising the challenges faced by the Council.

39 Scrutiny Annual Report 2020-21 & Scrutiny Work Programme. (For Information) (Councillor Peter Black - Chair of Scrutiny)

Councillor P M Black, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee presented a report which supported the development of a strong relationship between Scrutiny and the Governance & Audit Committee by providing the recently published Scrutiny Annual Report 2020-21 and information about the current Scrutiny Work Programme.

It was noted that the Council had long recognised the relationship between Scrutiny and Audit and need for:

- mutual awareness and understanding of the each other's work;
- respective work plans to be coordinated to avoid duplication / gaps;
- clear mechanism for referral of issues, if necessary.

The importance of the following was highlighted:

- clarity between the core roles of both functions;
- regular conversations about Committees' work programmes, and responsibilities;
- a way to ensure that issues can be passed between Committees, avoiding duplication.

The actions already undertaken in this respect were listed and it was noted that the relationship benefitted from a number of Councillors sitting on both Committees. The Scrutiny Annual Report 2020-21 was provided at Appendix 1.

The Committee discussed the work followed by the Scrutiny Programme Committee and Scrutiny Performance Panels, particularly holding the Executive to account, the follow-up monitoring process and how Scrutiny was seeking to improve standards.

The Chair added that she would be attending the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 19 October 2021 to present the Governance & Audit Committee Annual Report 2020-21 & Committee Work Plan. She emphasised the importance of both Committees working together for clarity, mutual understanding and efficiency.

She requested that the Scrutiny Programme Committee Work Plan be included in the Governance & Audit Committee Work Plan report for all future Committee meetings.

40 Auditor General for Wales Review of Town Centre Regeneration. (For Information) (Ben Smith)

Ben Smith, Chief Finance / Section 151 Officer, presented 'for information' the Auditor General for Wales Review of Town Centre Regeneration report.

It was added that under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, principal council's had a duty to respond to the Auditor General's recommendations.

The report made a number of recommendations to local authorities and the Welsh Government. It was explained that following on from letters sent to each council by Audit Directors in June 2021 noting that councils' Governance and Audit Committee should formally consider all reports of external review bodies – principally; Audit Wales, Estyn and the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).

The requirements of the Auditor General were outlined as follows: -

“We expect each local authority to consider the findings of this review and our recommendations, and that its governance and audit committee receives this report and monitors its response to our recommendations in a timely way”.

The Committee commented upon the following: -

- The option of the report being referred to the Development and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel for further discussion;
- Additional Councillor training / guidance being provided in order for the issues raised to be dealt with appropriately;
- Reports available on the Audit Wales website;
- How it was the responsibility of the Authority to establish which reports required responses.

The Chair stated that she had been invited to a meeting with Officers scheduled for 21 October 2021 to further discuss the report and agree an appropriate way forward.

It was added that future progress would be monitored by the Development & Regeneration Scrutiny Panel.

41 Governance & Audit Committee Action Tracker Report. (For Information) (Jeremy Parkhouse)

The Governance & Audit Committee Action Tracker was reported 'for information'.

The Chair noted that some actions remained outstanding, including the tracking of Audit Wales recommendations / consideration of how other local authorities managed and tracked the recommendations.

42 Governance & Audit Committee Work Plan. (For Information) (Jeremy Parkhouse)

The Governance & Audit Committee Work Plan was reported 'for information'.

The Chair added that the new areas of the Committee's work should be incorporated into the Work Plan before May 2022.

The meeting ended at 3.28 pm

Chair