



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Governance & Audit Committee**

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Wednesday, 11 January 2023 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor P R Hood-Williams (Vice Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

P R Hood-Williams
M B Lewis
K M Roberts

Councillor(s)

A J Jeffery
M W Locke
L V Walton

Councillor(s)

J W Jones
S Pritchard
T M White

Lay Member(s)

Gordon Anderson
Julie Davies
Philip Sharman

Officer(s)

Ness Young	Interim Director of Corporate Services
Debbie Smith	Deputy Chief Legal Officer
Lee Cambule	Tackling Poverty Service Manager
Michelle Davies	Cash Management & Accounts Receivable Manager
Rachael Davies	Head of HR & Service Centre
Sarah Lackenby	Head of Digital and Customer Services
Jeremy Parkhouse	Democratic Services Officer
Debbie Smith	Deputy Chief Legal Officer
Lee Cambule	Tackling Poverty Service Manager
Michelle Davies	Cash Management & Accounts Receivable Manager
Rachael Davies	Head of HR & Service Centre
Sarah Lackenby	Head of Digital and Customer Services

Apologies for Absence

Paula O'Connor, Ben Smith, Non Jenkins, Gillian Gillett

75 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, no interests were declared.

76 Minutes.

Resolved that the Minutes of the previous meeting(s) of the Governance & Audit Committee were approved as a correct record.

77 Annual Complaints Report 2021-22.

Sarah Lackenby, Head of Head of Digital and Customer Services presented a 'for information' report which provided assurance on the complaints handling process and reported on the complaints performance.

It was recognised that the impact of the pandemic on services continued to be seen throughout 2021-22, including:

- The increased complexity of cases across all Social Services teams.
- Recruitment pressures across social care leading to staffing issues with providers.
- The reduction of available staff due to sickness absence.
- A delay in launching the new IT system as the Council prioritised payments and support to residents and businesses. The system would make the process easier for the public and more efficient for staff with improved reporting functionality. The aim was to go live with staff trained for the start of the new financial year.

The report provided details on the following: -

- Corporate stage 1 complaints (informal);
- Corporate stage 2 complaints;
- Social Services complaints;
- Cases reported to the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales);
- Welsh Language complaint;
- Performance of the key performance indicators (KPI's).

Appendix A provided the KPI's which mirrored the targets laid out in the Council's Complaints Policies and performance for 2021-22. It was emphasised that there were no areas of significant concern.

The Committee discussed the following: -

- Details surrounding the KPI's, particularly 1,274 stage one complaints received in 2021-22, which was an 8.1% increase on the previous year.
- There were no targets due to this being the first year of KPI's.
- Providing year on year information including numbers not only percentages and in table format to allow the Committee to monitor any changes.
- The positive impact the new IT system would provide.
- How different departments / service areas monitor complaints and information relating to these monitoring procedures being included in future reports.
- Dealing with complaints which are out of the Council's control, e.g. flooding.
- Social Services monitoring undertaken by Scrutiny.

78 **Accounts Receivable.**

Michelle Davies, Cash Management & Accounts Receivable Manager presented a report which provided an update for the Service Centre, Accounts Receivable function.

It was outlined that the Accounts Receivable (AR) Internal Audit was carried out in Quarter 1 2022 and the report was issued in March 2022. An assurance level of Moderate was again given. There was 1 High Risk and 2 Medium Risk action points, one of which was from previous audits that remained outstanding. All of the Audit action points had been reviewed and included in the AR strategy. The AR team had been given priorities and targets that were aligned with the corporate strategies and the Internal Audit action plan. However, it was anticipated that it would not be possible to complete all of these actions.

The Committee were also updated regarding debt recovery activities meetings, outstanding aged debt, write offs, referrals to Legal, service department liaison, disputed invoices, Legal department liaison and challenges remaining and future activities (identified in June 2022 report) which included a progress update.

The Committee discussed the following: -

- The aged debt figures provided at paragraph 1.5 of the report, how it included all debts on the system, reasons for write offs, the effort made in reducing the overall debt across departments and the positive progress made.
- The implementation of the Statutory Debt Repayment Plan and the impact it would have on the Council.
- The root cause evaluation of debts in order to identify trends and the work undertaken to prevent credit / services being provided if possible, for departments to collect at source to prevent debts and the system processes being followed.
- The processes undertaken for write offs and the credits / debits received by departments when raising / writing off debts.
- Providing the value and volume totals of write offs / disputed invoices in future reports to allow the Committee to be able to better understand the position.
- Details of the debt review meetings arranged with department / Legal Services.
- The impact of staff vacancies upon the Accounts Receivable Team.
- How providing an order number speeds up the payment of debt in large organisations, some of whom would not pay without an order number which slows down cash-flow.

Resolved that Officers continue to report to CMT on a quarterly basis as a further update on the debt position across the Authority.

79 **Report on the Audit Wales 'Time for Change' – Poverty in Wales Report Recommendations.**

Lee Cambule, Tackling Poverty Service Manager presented a 'for information' report which provided a briefing to the Committee on the findings of the Auditor General for

Wales review of tackling poverty in Wales and its recommendations for action by local authorities.

It was outlined that Swansea Council's Report on the Audit Wales 'Time for Change' Poverty in Wales report recommendations provided a summary of the report and its findings, as well as highlighting the examples of good practice by Swansea Council which were noted in the review. It also defined the Council's response to the eight recommendations and noted areas for further action which would be explored further in the refresh of the Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy.

The Council's analysis of the findings of Audit Wales' report was provided at Appendix A. The report recognised the evidence of the examples of good work already being done within the Council, the Council's response to the recommendations and the actions planned.

The Committee discussed the following: -

- Expanding communications to be able to consult more widely with communities, including people currently experiencing poverty and supporting them to access online facilities.
- Listening to people who are experiencing poverty.
- Avoiding duplication across local authorities, being more effective and efficient in tackling poverty.
- Recommendation 7 - Streamlining and improving application and information services for people in poverty - particularly whether this was ambitious enough and the need to complete work in this area.
- The need for Audit Wales representatives to comment upon the report.

80 Governance & Audit Committee Action Tracker Report.

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

81 Governance & Audit Committee Work Plan 2022-23.

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

The meeting ended at 3.05 pm

Chair