

Governance Committee

1. This report summarises the business undertaken at the Governance Committee meeting held on 17 January 2024.

General Report of the Meeting Held on 17 January 2024

Annual Governance Statement Management Actions Update

2. The Head of Audit and Risk presented this report which provided an update on agreed management actions in response to risks identified in the Annual Governance Statement.
3. Our attention was drawn to three areas specifically that related to non-implementation of agreed audit actions, the quality of the Council's asset inventory and fully embedding risk management throughout the council. In addressing these actions, we heard that progress had been made in achieving targets in completing agreed audit management actions through the use of the council's risk management system, GRACE, and ongoing discussions and monitoring by directorate management teams. A significant piece of work had been undertaken over the last twelve months in logging inventories, utilising new systems to ensure that all the relevant processes were accurately followed, with a subsequent internal audit review completed to provide further assurances. The action concerning the updated Risk Management Strategy would be covered in greater detail in the later agenda item.
4. The Annual Governance Statement that will be presented to Committee in May would include a final update on the management actions, in addition to any further areas identified and reported in that document.
5. Responding to a number of questions, we were advised that steps had been taken to better manage the council's contracts, noting that a strengthened procurement team would soon be able to take a more proactive role in supporting teams in this area. Additionally, further clarification on processes around waiving of contract procedure rules was provided. Mandatory training was also highlighted within the report with improvements in completion rates of staff training across the organisation since the implementation of a rolling programme of online training now provided and regularly monitored.
6. We were informed that the deferred audit review into how the council manage any risks of fraud was anticipated to be completed by the end of March 2024.
7. Reassurance was provided to Committee that no risks had been identified concerning procurement exercises that had been carried during the pandemic. We noted the report.

Code of Conduct and Associated Social Media Protocol

8. The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented this report which sought the Committee's recommendation to Full Council for the approval of the Local Government Association Model Code of Conduct and also to agree the terms of reference for a working group to consider the associated Social Media Protocol. Both the Code of Conduct and the Social Media Protocol were debated at the last meeting and a decision deferred to undertake further work and consideration. The proposed Code of Conduct seeks to align Chorley with the county council and other town and parish councils in the local area, providing a consistent approach for any members who may be elected to more than one council.
9. We were supportive of adopting the new Model Code of Conduct and recommending its adoption by Full Council.
10. We heard that there was a current protocol around social media use in place, and whilst it did also apply to members, it was noted that it was primarily directed towards council staff.
11. Following discussion, we agreed to establish a working group to review the Social Media Protocol with the following terms of reference as suggested within the report:
 - a. Authority to review other similar protocols
 - b. That the wording should be declarative – "I will"
 - c. That a comprehensive document would be preferable
 - d. That it include a 'dos and don'ts' section
 - e. That membership be drawn from the Governance Committee
12. We also requested the process of adopting the new protocol be expedited, with a hope that this could be completed prior to the elections in May of this year.
13. Responding to a query about the complaints procedure and the benefits of a panel, and not just one senior officer, determining whether any complaints about councillors are escalated, we were informed that the current procedure was comparable to most other local authorities with the Monitoring Officer (or Deputy where appropriate) in consultation with one of the Council's Independent Persons determining how best to handle any complaints received.
14. We resolved to;
 - i. **To recommend to Council the approval and adoption of the Model Code of Conduct; and**
 - ii. **Agree the terms of reference for a working group to be established to consider an updated Social Media Protocol for Members.**

Internal Audit Progress Report

15. The Senior Auditor presented this report which provided an update on the work undertaken and ongoing in respect of the Internal Audit Plan (September 2023 – December 2023)
16. As outlined within the report, our attention was drawn to the two reviews that had been given a 'limited' assurance rating, those being related to the physical security and environmental controls and also staff driving licence checks. It was noted that short deadlines for the completion of audit actions had been agreed to ensure areas of concern were addressed as soon as possible. The Director of Customer and Digital, the Head of HR and the Head of Property and Development were introduced to respond to any technical questions we had.
17. Regarding the performance of the audit team, we were provided reassurance that they were on track to deliver the Internal Audit Plan and satisfaction survey results remain high.
18. Questions were asked about the significant concerns around the security of the council's ICT systems and sought assurances that actions would be completed by the agreed timescales. The seriousness of the issues highlighted within the report were acknowledged and in response, we heard that progress had already been made in terms of sourcing specialist contractors to carry out the required work and was expected to be completed by the end of March 2024. Several aspects had already been actioned with regards to protocols around security alarms and building access. Clarification was provided with regards to fire suppression measures mentioned in the report, with additional staff training been arranged. Further work was also highlighted around CCTV which was underway following a new contract being agreed recently. We welcomed a further progress update at a future meeting on the cost implications of the project to complete the agreed audit actions. Moving forward, a formal risk register was now in place which could be better monitored and managed, with risk management training undertaken with new starters and teams on an ongoing basis.
19. Responding to a query whether heat and energy produced from server rooms could be harnessed for use around the building, we were informed that the increased use of cloud based external servers had reduced the overall need for on site servers, and advancements in technology meant that servers were generally much more efficient in their energy consumption.
20. Responding to queries raised regarding missed quality checks identified in the council tax review, it was noted that staffing changes and a period of transition as the two customer services teams became shared had been a factor but these checks had now been reintroduced.
21. We were reassured that no areas of concern had been raised by the checks of staff driving licences, however the review had triggered a review of wider issues

to consider such as insurance with updates to policies being made where appropriate.

22. On GDPR compliance it was noted that this was an ongoing process due to staff turnover with acknowledgement there may have been lapses, however improvements in this area had been demonstrated. We noted the report.

Risk Management Strategy

23. The Head of Audit and Risk presented this report which sought the Committee's approval of the revised Risk Management Strategy.

24. Amendments to the document had been highlighted within the report with the key point being setting out the level of risk the Council is prepared to tolerate. We were advised that any red residual risks that remained after directorate level review would now be escalated to the senior management team who would determine on a case-by-case basis whether to implement further controls or tolerate the risk. If approved, the next steps were for the Head of Audit and Risk to meet with senior managers to review their reports so that they can be regularly monitored.

25. We were supportive of the proposed amendments to the Risk Management Strategy.

26. We resolved to;

- i. **Approve the revised Risk Management Strategy for adoption.**

RIPA Application Update

27. The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that no RIPA applications had been made. We noted the update.

Work Programme

28. We considered the work programme for 2023/24 which set out the reports to be considered at each Governance Committee meeting throughout the Council year. We requested that an item be added to the March 2024 meeting to consider and approve the proposed new social media protocol that the working group would be reviewing.

Recommendations

29. To note the report.

Councillor Alan Platt

Chair of the Governance Committee

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