

Governance and Audit Committee

ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16



Foreword by Councillor John Buckley, Chairman of the Governance and Audit Committee

This report provides an overview of the Governance and Audit Committee's activity during the municipal year 2015/16.

I am pleased to report that the Committee continues to make progress in terms of discharging its responsibilities to provide independent assurance on the adequacy of the council's risk management framework and the associated control environment, and in providing robust scrutiny and challenge of the Authority's financial performance.

As outlined in the body of this report, the Committee has been actively engaged with both internal and external audit, and I would like to thank all the Members who served on the Committee during 2015/16. My thanks also go to the Council officers who have supported the work of the Committee and more specifically to me in my role as Chairman.

In looking forward to 2016/17 and beyond, and given the continued financial pressures facing the Council, the importance of an effective Governance and Audit Committee remains critical.

1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The council established a Governance and Audit Committee in March 2006. Whilst there is no statutory obligation to have an Audit Committee, they are widely recognised as a core component of effective governance. In recent years there has been a significant amount of regulation and guidance issues in governance arrangements for private and public sector bodies, the common feature of governance arrangements being the existence of an Audit Committee.
- 1.2 The purpose of the Council's Governance and Audit Committee is to provide independent assurance of the adequacy of the risk management framework and the associated control environment, independent review of the authority's financial and non financial performance to the extent that it affects the authority's exposure to risk and weakens the control environment, and to oversee the financial reporting process.
- 1.3 There are many benefits to be gained from an effective Audit Committee. In fulfilling its role the Committee will:
 - reduce the risks of illegal or improper acts;
 - reinforce the importance and independence of internal and external Audit;
 - increase confidence in the objectivity and fairness of financial reporting.
- 1.4 Stricter internal control and the establishment of a Governance and Audit Committee can never eliminate the risks of serious fraud, misconduct or misrepresentation of the financial position. However, it will:
 - give additional assurance through a process of independent and objective review; and
 - raise awareness of the need for internal control and the implementation of audit recommendations.

2.0 Membership

2.1 For the period May 2015 to April 2016 the Governance and Audit Committee comprised of nine members and met on five occasions. Committee agenda papers and minutes are available on the council's website (www.thanet.gov.uk).

Members	24/06/15	02/09/15	24/09/15	09/12/15	15/03/16
Cllr Ashbee (from 15/10/15)				✓	✓
Cllr Buckley (VC up to 3/12/15, C from 3/12/15)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cllr Campbell	✓	A	✓	✓	✓
Cllr Collins (up to 15/10/15)	✓	✓	✓		
Cllr Connor	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cllr Day	Ab	A	✓	✓	A
Cllr Dexter	✓	✓	✓	A	✓
Cllr Dixon (from 3/12/15)				Ab	A
Cllr Edwards	Ab	✓	✓	✓	A
Cllr Game (from 15/10/15)				✓	A
Cllr I Gregory (VC from 3/12/15)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cllr Hillman	Ab	✓	A	Ab	A
Cllr Jaye-Jones (R up to 15/10/15)		S	S	✓	✓
Cllr Larkins	✓	A	✓	✓	Ab
Cllr Munday (C up to 3/12/15)	✓	A	A		
Cllr Taylor-Smith (from 15/10/15)				✓	✓
Cllr Partington (R from 15/10/15)	✓	✓	✓		S
Cllr Evans (R)					
Cllr J Fairbrass (R)			S		
Cllr Fenner (R)		S			
Cllr Leys (R)					
Cllr Howes (R)					
Cllr Savage (R from 15/10/15)	n/a	n/a	n/a		
Cllr Taylor (R)			S		

Key

C	Chairman	VC	Vice Chairman	S	Substitute
A	Apologies	IA	In Attendance	Ab	Absent

3.0 Programme of reports 2015/16

3.1 Detailed below is the programme of reports considered by Governance and Audit Committee during 2015/16, and how they relate to the Committees terms of reference. Also shown are the items of training provided to the Committee.

Function/Issue	Responsible officer/ body	24/06/15	02/09/15	24/09/15	09/12/15	15/03/16
Audit activity						
External Audit Grant Certification Letter 2014/15	GT	✓				✓
External Audit Annual Letter	GT				✓	
Internal Audit Annual Fraud Report 2014-15	EKAP	✓				
External Audit Annual Grant Certification Report	GT					
Internal Audit Annual Report	EKAP	✓				
External Audit Findings Report and Financial Resilience Report	GT			✓		
External Audit Plan	GT					✓
External Audit Update Report	GT				✓	
Internal Audit Plan, Charter and Strategy	EKAP					✓
Internal Audit Quarterly Update Report	EKAP	✓		✓	✓	✓
Regulatory framework						
Anti-Fraud And Corruption And Anti-Bribery Policies	FSM			✓		
Annual Governance Statement 2014/15	DCG			✓		
Annual Governance Statement Action Plan Update	DCG	✓		✓	✓	✓
Annual Treasury Management Review 2014/15	DCR	✓				
Corporate Risk Register	EKAP/DCR	✓		✓	✓	✓
Draft Annual Governance Statement	DCG		✓			
External Funding and Grants Protocol	FSM	✓				
Governance Framework and Local Code of Corporate Governance	DCG					✓
Review of Effectiveness of the Council's Internal Audit Arrangement 2015/16	FSM					✓
Risk Management Strategy and Process	DCR				✓	
Treasury Management Strategy	FSM				✓	
Treasury Management Update	FSM			✓	✓	
Accounts						
Final Statement of Accounts	FSM			✓		

Key

DCG Director of Corporate Governance and Monitoring Officer

DCR Director of Corporate Resources and Section 151 Officer

EKAP East Kent Audit Partnership

FSM Financial Services Manager (Dep S151 Officer)

GT Grant Thornton

4.0 Review of the Governance and Audit Committee's effectiveness

4.1 The Governance and Audit Committee should ensure it has effective communication with the authority, to include the Executive, the Head of Internal Audit, the External Auditor and other stakeholders. Consequently it is considered to be best practice for the Committee to be self aware and to submit an annual report to Council.

4.2 The annual report summarises the work of the Committee for the year and concludes that it has received clear, concise and relevant information, regular training events on topics specific to the business of the Committee, and has done all that it can to meet the aims and objectives for the Committee in the best way that it can.

5.0 Annual Report

- 5.1 The Governance and Audit Committee is assured on the integrity and reliability of data held in the financial statement. It receives clear, concise reports and actions are dealt with in an appropriate timescale. The members of the Committee receive specific training in order to assist them with their role in receiving comprehensive assurance from the accounting officer.
- 5.2 The work of internal and external audit provides detailed assurance on the reliability and integrity of the information held in the financial statements as well as on the key control framework in operation across the council.
- 5.3 The assurances from the accounting officer, the work of internal and external audit together support the Committee in forming their opinion of the financial statements, enabling them to agree to sign them off in accordance with regulations.
- 5.4 The Committee receives a regular report on agreed actions from the Annual Governance Statement process. It also reviews the Council's Governance Framework and Local Code of Corporate Governance.
- 5.5 The Committee reviews the Risk Management Strategy on a regular basis and considers the effectiveness of the risk management process both through the work of internal audit and through receiving quarterly risk management reports.
- 5.6 The Committee considers the effectiveness of the internal audit arrangements by reviewing the annual assessment of the Director of Corporate Resources, the view of external audit and the quality of reports, actions and follow-ups through the quarterly reports submitted throughout the year to Committee.
- 5.7 The Committee is able to request service managers and, where necessary, the relevant portfolio holder to attend the Committee to give an update on progress against agreed actions to reduce risk and/or improve governance.
- 5.8 The Chairman and Officers have considered the effectiveness of the Committee. The evidence demonstrating achievement of the Committee's terms of reference is attached at Appendix 1.
- 5.9 The recommended actions are listed in annex 2 attached to this report. They will be incorporated into the council's Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2015/16 and then reviewed on a quarterly basis through the AGS action plan. All actions from previous years have now been completed.

6.0 Future Challenges

- 6.1 The Governance and Audit Committee will continue with its existing duties whilst continually striving to achieve best practice where this is feasible and affordable. In the forthcoming year, the Committee will need to:
 - address the implications of the Local Accountability and Audit Act 2014
 - oversee the new role of East Kent Audit Partnership in facilitating the risk management process
 - maintain effective internal control in a period of potential government funding reductions and service change.
 - work towards removal of the qualification in the Auditors Value for Money judgment

7.0 Appendices

- Appendix 1 Governance and Audit Committee Annual Assessment for the period 2015/16
- Appendix 2 Governance and Audit Committee Action Plan from 2015/16 assessment to be actioned in 2016/17

Governance and Audit Committee annual assessment for the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016

Good practice principle / description	Achieved	Not achieved	Achieved through:
Audit Committee practices, structure and operation			
Does the council have a stand-alone Audit Committee that reports regularly to Council?	✓		Annual Report of Governance and Audit Committee that goes to Annual Council
Is the Audit Committee comprised of members who are independent of the executive and financially literate?	✓		Members of the Committee are independent of the Executive. All Members are offered the opportunity of financial training with specific reference to approving the Statement of Accounts.
Are new members inducted, specifically on governance and finance, as well as receiving ongoing training and development opportunities?	✓		Governance and Financial section within formal Induction Programme for Members following Elections. Training sessions provided throughout the year, especially for the Statement of Accounts.
Does the Audit Committee meet regularly throughout the year? Are these meetings appropriately supported by officers of the council?	✓		Attendance records.
Is an annual calendar of meetings/reports prepared to ensure all duties noted in the terms of reference are fulfilled?	✓		Programme of reports within the Governance and Audit guidance pack.
Are agendas provided to Audit Committee members sufficiently in advance of meetings?	✓		Council protocol to issue agenda at least 5 clear working days prior to the meeting.
Is the Audit Committee's performance assessed against the duties and responsibilities detailed in the terms of reference?	✓		Through the Chairman's annual report.
Is this assessment provided to Council, and are appropriate actions taken to enhance the Committee if necessary?	✓		Annexed to Annual Report. Tailored and specific training provided as necessary.
Financial reporting			
Does the Audit Committee oversee the financial reporting process and credibility of the council's financial information?	✓		Through accepting reports in connection with the council's financial statements.
Does the Audit Committee receive regular reports on the council's Treasury Management process?	✓		Regular reports on the agenda, detailed in the Programme of Reports.

Good practice principle / description	Achieved	Not achieved	Achieved through:
Does the Audit Committee oversee the council's internal control framework?	✓		Reports to Committee – quarterly Internal Audit update reports, annual Internal Audit report and regular External Audit reports.
Are any issues that may negatively affect the financial information generated from the internal controls processes brought to the Audit Committee's attention?	✓		Discussion of reports at each Committee meeting.
Effective relationships with auditors			
Does the Audit Committee receive regular reports from the external auditors?	✓		Shown through the Programme of Reports.
Does the Audit Committee review and approve the internal auditors work plan and scope of planned audits, as well as their staffing and financial budgets?	✓		The Internal Audit Plan, which includes the Audit Charter and Strategy are programmed in for each March meeting of the Committee. This covers staffing and qualifications.
Does the Audit Committee receive reports dealing with the management and performance of the internal auditors?	✓		The Charter and Strategy cover these areas. Also Customer Feedback which is detailed in the quarterly Internal Audit update reports and the Internal Audit Annual Report.
Compliance with laws, regulations and internal policies			
Does the Audit Committee monitor compliance with internal policies, such as the code of conduct?	✓		These feature within the Internal Audit plan, specifically looking at the member and officer Code of Conduct. Also embedded within various audits.
Does the Audit Committee approve those policies / strategies that fall within its remit, such as anti fraud and corruption, whistleblowing, risk management?	✓		Detailed within the Programme of Reports.
Does the Audit Committee have the power to investigate any matters brought to their attention that have a significant impact of the council's financial or governance arrangements?	✓		Governance and Audit Committee have the ability to request appropriate Member/Officer attendance to respond to questions at next available meeting, or to provide a written update if the need is of an urgent nature. Extraordinary meetings can be called at the request of the Committee to consider any such reports.
Does the Audit Committee approve the Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement at the appropriate time?	✓		Meeting dates are arranged with deadline dates in mind to ensure they are met.
Terms of reference			

Good practice principle / description	Achieved	Not achieved	Achieved through:
Audit activity			
To consider the annual report and opinion of the East Kent Audit Partnership, and a summary of audit activity (actual and proposed) and the level of assurance it can give over the council's governance arrangements;	✓		Receiving East Kent Audit Partnership annual report.
To approve (but not direct) internal audit's strategy, plan and monitor performance;	✓		This is directed by the Section 151 Officer, and approved by Governance and Audit Committee at their meeting in March.
To consider summaries of specific internal audit reports as requested;	✓		Achieved through agreeing the annual audit plan, and receiving the quarterly internal update reports.
To consider reports dealing with the management and performance of the providers of internal audit services;	✓		Receiving the 'effectiveness of the council's Internal Audit arrangements' report prepared by the Section 151 Officer.
To consider a report from internal audit on agreed recommendations not implemented within a reasonable timescale;	✓		Contained within the quarterly internal audit reports and the internal audit annual report.
To consider the external auditor's annual letter, relevant reports and the report to those charged with governance;	✓		Receive the Annual Audit Letter normally in December and on a quarterly basis receive an update report from the external auditors.
To consider specific reports as agreed with the external auditor;	✓		The external auditors regularly provide reports to the Governance and Audit Committee on relevant matters.
To consider the annual programme of work and associated fees for the external auditors and provide challenge as appropriate	✓		Receive the annual audit fee from the external auditors.
To commission work from internal and external audit as agreed by the Committee.	✓		This enables Governance and Audit Committee to request work, but this has not been required during 2015/16.
Regulatory framework			
To review any governance / financial issue referred to it by the Chief Executive or a Director, or any council body;	✓		New due diligence protocol approved, consolidating existing practice, by Governance and Audit Committee in December 2014.
To monitor the effective development and operation of risk management and governance in the council;	✓		Approve the annual review of the risk management strategy and process, and receive the corporate risk register on a quarterly basis.

Good practice principle / description	Achieved	Not achieved	Achieved through:
To oversee the application of the council's governance arrangements for partnership activities where the council is the accountable body and / or employer;	✓		Internal audits for EK Services, East Kent Housing and East Kent HR Partnership, reported to Governance and Audit Committee in the quarterly Internal Audit update reports.
To approve the council policies on Anti-Bribery, Whistleblowing, Anti-fraud and Corruption and the External Funding Protocol;	✓		Received the reviewed policy for approval and received training on this matter.
To recommend to Cabinet the council's policy in Equalities;	✓		No reports received during 2013/14.
To approve the authority's Annual Governance Statement;	✓		Annual Governance Statement agreed by Governance and Audit Committee in Sept 2014.
To consider the council's compliance with its approved Treasury Management Strategy	✓		Agreed by Governance and Audit Committee who receive regular reports on this matter.
To consider the council's arrangements for governance and agreeing necessary actions to ensure compliance with best practice;	✓		Achieved by the Committee receiving the annual review of the Governance Framework and Local Code of Corporate Governance and agreeing the draft and final Annual Governance Statement.
To consider the council's arrangements for ensuring adequate data quality;	✓		Governance and Audit Committee are informed of when these documents have been reviewed, ensuring that adequate arrangements are in place.
To consider the council's compliance with its own and other published standards and controls.	✓		Achieved through reviewing the Committee's terms of reference and achievement against them, and production of the Annual Report.
Accounts			
To approve the annual Statement of Accounts. Specifically, to consider whether appropriate accounting policies have been followed and whether there are concerns arising from the financial statement or from the audit that need to be brought to the attention of the council;	✓		Receive and approve the Final Accounts in September of each year.
To consider the external auditor's report on issues from the audit of the accounts and recommend approval to those charged with governance.	✓		This is included within the Annual Audit Letter received in December each year.

Governance and Audit Committee Action Plan 2015/16

Following the completion of an annual assessment of the performance of the Governance and Audit Committee for the period May 2014 to April 2015, the issues below were identified and action was undertaken during the period May 2015 to April 2016 to address these.

Ref	Good practice principle / description / issue identified	Proposed Action	Proposed completion date	Responsible officer / body
14-15/01	Revised facilitation of risk management by EKAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarterly risk management update reports Annual review of risk management 	As and when required	DCR
14-15/02	Implement the requirements of the Local Accountability and Audit Act 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report from the Monitoring Officer with action plan Regular progress reports 	Reported to Committee in December 2015	DCG DCG
14-15/03	Ensure the Council addresses the impact of any major funding or service change following the 2015 General Election	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporated in the 2016-20 Medium Term Financial Strategy 	Budget & MTFS approved February 2016	DCR
14-15/04	Work towards having the removal of the qualification in the Auditors Value for Money judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extensive management of external auditor meetings with group leaders Careful relationship management of external auditor including production of credible value for money strategy Work done by Improvement Board Training programme to improve member behaviour (the source of the qualification) Constitution rewrite in progress to ensure robust arrangement in place for code breaches 	Completed Feb 2016	DCR CE DCG DCG

Governance and Audit Committee Action Plan 2016/17

Following the completion of an annual assessment of the performance of the Governance and Audit Committee for the period May 2015 to April 2016, the issues below were identified and action will be undertaken during the period May 2016 to April 2017 to address these.

Ref	Good practice principle / description / issue identified	Proposed Action	Proposed completion date	Responsible officer / body
15-16/01	CIPFA-Good Governance in Local Government -2016 Framework	Implement new framework	On-going	DCG DCR
15-16/02	Implement the requirements of the Local Accountability and Audit Act 2014	Keep Committee informed as options become clearer	On-going	DCR

Key:

DCG Director of Corporate Governance & Monitoring Officer
 DCR Director of Corporate Resources/S151 Officer
 CE Chief Executive