

Implementation of the recommendations of the External Auditor and the Independent Monitoring Officer

Meetings	Council 30th March 2023
Report Authors	Chief Executive and the Leader
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Ash Ashbee
Status	For Noting
Classification:	Unrestricted
Key Decision	No
Ward:	All Wards

Executive Summary:

This report informs Members about progress on the implementation of the recommendations of the External Auditor in their report to the council issued under Section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014; and on the recommendations made in the report of the Independent Monitoring Officer.

Recommendation:

Full Council are asked to note the report.

Corporate Implications

Financial and Value for Money

There are no direct financial implications arising from the consideration and noting of this report.

The progress to date against the recommended actions has been delivered either within existing agreed resources or with the support of funding from the Local Government Association.

Legal

The Localism Act 2011 places a duty on the Council to promote and maintain high standards of conduct amongst Members and co-opted Members of the authority. The update within this report provides assurance to the authority, parish and town councils, and individual councillors that the IMO recommendations are complying with the requirements set out in the Localism Act 2011.

1.0 Report of the Leader and Chief Executive

1. The Council's External Auditors, Grant Thornton, issued a report under Section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 on 12 October 2021.
2. That report made a number of recommendations, which were considered and approved by Council on 2 November 2021
3. One of the recommendations was that the Council should appoint an Independent Monitoring Officer (IMO), with a remit to investigate the issues raised by the External Auditor, and to look more broadly at the governance of the Council.
4. The IMO produced his report, which was considered by Council on 19th May 2022. The recommendations made by the IMO were approved by Council.
5. Subsequent to these decisions, a number of senior staff left the Council's service, including all of the Statutory Officers.
6. The Council has now appointed Chris Blundell as Director of Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer. Sameera Khan was appointed as the Interim Monitoring Officer on 18 July 2022, and is currently under contract with us until at least the end of July 2023. Colin Carmichael was appointed as Interim Chief Executive (and Head of the Paid Service) on 20th July, and is under contract until at least the end of July 2023.
7. As the Council's Statutory Officers, they have worked with the Service Directors (now Heads of Service) to form the Council's Corporate Management Team. One of the remits of the CMT has been to work with Councillors to implement the recommendations of the External Auditor and the IMO.
8. We do not propose to rehearse the details behind the reasons for the reports. Councillors will be very aware of those reasons, and have previously discussed them in detail.
9. The purpose of this report, therefore, is to set out (in Annexes 1 and 2) the specific recommendations made in each of the reports issued by Grant Thornton and the IMO, and to update Cabinet and Council on the progress that has been made. The Annexes are in the form of Action Plans which record the latest position on each recommendation
10. Councillors will see that the great majority of the recommendations have been either completed or nearly so. Those that have not been are longer term issues and are, in our opinion, for the next Council to take forward.
11. We have shared this report with Grant Thornton and with the IMO, who both confirm that, in their view, this gives an accurate representation of the progress made by the Council.
12. We will separately report to central Government to ensure that the Secretary of State is aware of this progress.
13. Council are asked to discuss and note the progress made on the recommendations they have previously approved

Contact Officer: Colin Carmichael, Interim Chief Executive

Annex List

Annex 1: IMO Action Plan

Annex 2: Section 24 Action Plan

Corporate Consultation

Finance: *(Chris Blundell, Acting Deputy Chief Executive & S151 Officer)*

Legal: *(Sameera Khan, Interim Head of Legal & Monitoring Officer)*