

LOUTH COUNTY COUNCIL

Audit Committee:

Minutes of the Meeting of Louth County Council Audit Committee held in the Setanta Room, County Hall, Dundalk on Thursday, 26th January 2023, which commenced at 10a.m.

Present: Mr. Richard Bowden
Mr. Billy Doyle
Ms. Irene McCausland
Cllr. Conor Keelan

Apologies: Cllr. Paula Butterly

In attendance: Mr. Joe McGuinness, Director of Services
Ms. Gráinne Tuomey, Meetings Administrator
Mr. Thomas McEvoy, Director of Services
Ms. Bernie Woods, Director of Services

***Items were taken out of sequence to accommodate external attendees but minuted as per the agenda**

1. Minutes *

On the proposal of Irene McCausland and seconded by Billy Doyle the minutes of the meeting of 8th December 2022 were approved.

2. Matters arising*

It was confirmed that the amended Section 60 report referred to in the minutes had gone to Joe McGuinness for onward transmission to the CE and Council.

3. Conflicts of Interest

None declared. Richard Bowden noted that the Internal Audit Plan included a 'Review of companies where Louth County Council are stakeholders' and advised the committee that his company acts as auditor for one of these companies.

4. Directorate Report on Risk Management & VFM Initiatives

Strategic Economic Development Annual Report to the Audit Committee

Thomas McEvoy Director of Services for Strategic Economic Development gave the committee an overview of the three key areas of responsibility within the Directorate and spoke of his recent appointment to the role of Director and his previous experience in Economic Development.

Mr. McEvoy advised of fortnightly meetings of Seniors within the Directorate, the agenda of which includes H&S and Risk Management as standard and of a quarterly full review of the Risk Register. Of the 19 risks identified, only 1 is currently categorised as High Risk, this being the recruitment and retention of retained Firefighters, which the committee were told is not only a local issue but is experienced by other councils nationally.

Further items discussed included

- The Directorate being a conduit for funding mechanisms for other sections
- Cessation of the Peace IV programme and implementation of Peace Plus
- Planning Contributions and coordination with Finance on collection
- Risk Assessment & Risk Management training and identification
- Commencement of online ePlanning application system
- New responsibilities –
 - cessation of SHDs (Strategic Housing Developments) previously dealt with by An Bord Pleanála, replaced by new LRD scheme (Large-scale Residential Developments) which fall to Local Government to administer
 - mapping of RZLT (Residential Zoned Land Tax) scheme for Revenue
- Tourism promotion and opportunities

The committee thanked Thomas McEvoy for his attendance and wished him well in his role.

Support and Water Services Directorate Annual Report to the Audit Committee

Bernie Woods Director of Services for Support Services gave the committee an overview of the three key areas of responsibility within the Directorate, namely,

- Finance
- IT
- Water Services

Ms. Woods spoke of ongoing checks and balances to mitigate potential risks in the Finance area including segregation of duties, and dual authorization of payments. She

spoke of the imminent take over by Irish Water/Uisce Eireann. She suggested that IT was the biggest directorate risk item but considered that good controls were in place. The Committee expressed surprise that Cyber security was not rated as a high risk item on the Risk Register considering a previous negative Internal Audit Report which raised concerns.

Joe McGuinness suggested that it may be a red category on the strategic risk assessment, and Ms. Woods advised that the directorate risk register was due to be reviewed, however a cyber security officer post was advertised and she considered robust systems were in place in all areas of the Directorate.

Other items discussed included

- Implementation of Travel and Subsistence Working Group
- E-Procurement
- Updates and Improvement to Agresso – Unit 4 and the Rent/Loans Systems

The Committee thanked Ms. Woods for her attendance and contribution and requested her attendance at the April meeting to give an overview on the Annual Financial Statement.

5. Internal Audit Plan (draft) for 2023

Joe McGuinness Director of Services advised that he, the Chief Executive, and the Internal Auditor had met and agreed on the draft Internal Audit Plan as presented to the Committee. Two of the six plan items are statutory audits, the SICAP and the Public Spending Code,(PSC) with the PSC audit commencing imminently.

The Internal Auditor had suggested the review of companies where Louth County Council are stakeholders, and the committee were advised that the last two items on the Plan had never been audited.

The Chair Richard Bowden thought ICT might appear as a plan item, and was advised that cybersecurity along with many other items had been suggested but were not taken up.

A discussion took place on the contents of the draft plan.

The Chair suggested that the Internal Auditor could report on progress later in the year on previous recommendations made. He also requested that three items be asked of the internal auditor on the 2023 plan,

- Is it sufficient

- Is it broad enough
- Should ICT feature

Joe McGuinness suggested that taking up of recommendations made in Internal Audit rests with Louth County Council rather than the Internal Auditor. He advised that the Procurement Committee addressed recommendations agreed and closed off many others in a report. This report may be shared with the Audit Committee and will be made available for the April meeting.

It was agreed that Richard Bowden would meet with the Internal Auditor and Joe McGuinness in the interim and approval of the plan would be deferred to the April meeting.

6. Overview of the Rates Waiver Scheme in Local Authorities – VFM Unit in Local Government

Bernie Woods Director of Services advised on the NOAC report, VFM Unit in Local Government. The Committee were advised that this was not an audit and was simply an information overview of the Rates Waiver Scheme introduced due to lockdown measures during the pandemic. The Committee were advised that rates can account for up to 40% of Louth County Council income. The Committee were told of full Rates waiver funding in 2020 with payments scaled down quarterly thereafter.

7. AOB

Training Opportunity

Referring to a document on Audit (and Risk) Committee Member Training by the IPA, it was agreed that Louth County Council will book the training for the Members and it will be explored if the committee can attend together. The preferred date of attendance for training is 1st June 2022.

Draft Committee Annual Work Programme

The inclusion of item 11 referring to Protected Disclosures and the responsibilities of the Audit Committee relating to same was discussed in detail.

It was ultimately agreed that the Chair would meet with the Director, discuss wording of the Annual Work Programme, the Charter and Standing Orders, and advise the Committee thereafter of any changes to those proposed before them. The Committee advised they were happy to approve subject to same.

The meeting concluded.

Confirmed at Meeting held on: 20 April 2023

Chairman: Richard Bowden

Meetings Administrator: 