

LOUTH COUNTY COUNCIL

Audit Committee

Minutes of the Meeting of Louth County Council Audit Committee held via Zoom on Thursday, 12th November, 2020 at 9 a.m.

Present: Mr. Richard Bowden
Cllr. C. Keelan
Ms. Irene Mc Causland

In attendance: Mr. Joe McGuinness, Director of Services
Ms. Gráinne Tuomey

Apologies: Mr. Billy Doyle

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th September, 2020 were proposed by I. McCausland, seconded by Cllr. C. Keelan and agreed by the committee.

2. Matters Arising

- The Chairperson advised that he has sought clarity on the areas of responsibility of the Audit Committee as set out within Louth County Council Risk Management Policy. R. Bowden has forwarded the paragraph contained within the Policy on Risk Management Responsibilities of the Audit Committee to IPA lecturers Aidan Horan.
- The Chair referred to a 2 page report received from Bernie Woods, Head of Finance updating the committee on Rates Collection, Unfunded Balances, Pension Policy for Public Servants and Land Loans, as requested at last meeting. The committee advised that they were happy with this report and the Chair noted that an update on Accounting Policies had been included and extended thanks to Ms. Woods for her report.
- The audit tracker was discussed and how risk levels were rated. J. McGuinness advised that Management Team were looking at updating specific areas in the same format and an update would be available at the December Meeting.

3. Conflicts of Interest

There were no conflicts of interest raised by the members of the committee.

4. Risk Register

J. McGuinness displayed a revised Risk Register, the template of which was provided by the Council's insurers Irish Public Bodies. The committee were advised that following review Corporate Risks had been categorised from circa 77 to 7 with others demoted to Directorate level and Directors been given specific ownership.

The Committee were shown the process for risk identification, categorisation of risk under a new traffic light system, and how the risk levels can change quarterly following mitigations put in place.

The committee was advised that training had taken place in August 2019 on Risk Assessment and use of the Register. Risks are now rescored every quarter with some risks which fall into the minimal category being parked to be reviewed annually at which stage they may be re-categorised and unparked.

The committee requested that a report on any changes to High Level Risks be presented at the next Audit Committee meeting following the change.

5. Risk Management Policy

J. McGuinness advised that the Risk Management Policy had been reviewed and updated to address all issues previously raised. The Corporate Risk Register was also updated to reflect changes and a new risk scoring rating had been agreed at Management Team.

J. McGuinness gave an overview of items and changes within the revised Policy document and directed Committee Members to page 9 which showed the 7 high level risk areas which incorporated the 5 Directorates within the Council and gave specific regard to Health & Safety and Major Emergency.

It was noted that it was the responsibility of the Management team to report on all major risks to the Audit Committee and it was confirmed that this would form part of the minutes of the Management Team.

Three items within the Risk Management Process were identified as the responsibility of J. McGuinness to action:

- Present an update on the management of risks and the effectiveness of the underlying controls/planned mitigations to the Audit Committee
- Individual Directors should present to the Audit Committee at least annually on risks in their area and management of same

- Complete an annual review of the risk management strategy and associated risk appetite and submit a summary report to the Audit Committee

The hierarchy of the adoption of the Risk Management Policy was queried by I. McCausland and J. McGuinness advised that while there was a gap in the guidance of same, the Policy was approved by the Management Team and signed off by the Chief Executive and there was no requirement on the Audit Committee to approve. I. McCausland suggested a Control Page to identify versions of policy and who authorised sign off might be helpful and she would forward template.

The Chair advised that the revised Risk Management Policy and Risk Register appeared to present a cohesive and constructive policy & procedure document and thanked J. McGuinness for his presentation of same.

A timetable for Director Reports was requested and the committee were advised that these should be available from end of Q1 2021 but would be expected to be available one at a time.

6. AOB

Cllr. Keelan requested that J. McGuinness give a briefing on the Budget status. J. McGuinness advised Committee that the budget was up for adoption at Monday's Council Meeting. The Committee were advised that while the 2021 Budget figure appears substantially higher than that of 2020, the increase mainly consisted of grant scheme funding for Approved Housing Bodies which Louth County Council would receive from the Department before releasing to the AHB. The Elected Members must adopt or amend the budget within 14 days of being brought to the Council by law.

The Chair advised a report requested from the Internal Auditor will not be available at the December meeting due to Covid hindering work.

The chair requested confirmation of whether the briefing from ASM on the subject of Risk within the authority would go ahead on 10th. December. Joe was to check this out and revert.

It was agreed to hold the next meeting on 10th December 2020 at 9a.m. by zoom.

That concluded the business of the meeting.

Confirmed at Meeting held on :

Chairman:

Meetings Administrator