

AUDIT AND CORPORATE SERVICES REVIEW COMMITTEE

10 November 2021

Present: Councillor D Clements (Chair)
Councillor P Baker, Dr R Heath Davies, Mrs S Hoss, Councillor M James, Mr G Jones, Councillor R Owens and Councillor M Williams.

(Virtual Meeting: 10.00am-11.30am; 11.40am -12.35pm)

1. Apology

An apology for absence was received from Councillor P Kidney.

2. Disclosures

There were no disclosures of interest.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 14 July 2021 were presented for confirmation and authentication.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2021 be confirmed and authenticated.

4. Internal Audit Report 2021/22

The Chair welcomed Jonathan Maddock from TIAA, the Authority's Internal Auditors. He explained that his report was in several parts – a Summary Internal Controls Assurance Report, together with reviews of Estates Delivery and IT Strategy – and he took Members through the documents.

It was reported that Estates Management had been given a substantial assurance, with only one recommendation to develop an overarching Estates Strategy, while the IT Strategy had been given a reasonable assurance with recommendations that the draft IT Strategy be formally approved and that the work streams identified in the Corporate and Resources Plan 2020/21 be prioritised to enable the best use of the Authority's available IT resources.

In respect of the Estates Strategy, one Member asked whether it was proposed for this to include the Authority's approach to meeting the decarbonisation targets, or whether these would be contained within a separate document. The Chief Executive replied that as the decarbonisation agenda would be central to the work of the Authority, the strategy to be developed would incorporate decarbonisation. Additional work to guide the production of the strategy had been commissioned, and this would be shared with Members in due course.



A number of Members expressed concern regarding the suggestion that there was insufficient resources within the IT Team to support the workstreams identified in the Corporate and Resources Plan. Officers replied that an additional member of staff had recently been recruited in order to assist with the migration to Microsoft 365 as this was a key project for the Authority at the present time. Once the current task of identifying the Authority's priorities was complete, IT resources could be allocated accordingly and any deficiencies considered by the Leadership Team; however the Chief Executive advised that some projects might have to be delayed until appropriate resources could be assigned.

Turning to the Summary Internal Controls Assurance (SICA) report, Mr Maddock explained that this provided the Committee with an update on the emerging governance, risk and internal control related issues and the progress of the Internal Auditor's work against the Annual Audit Plan. It was noted that the review of Risk Management would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee as it would be presented in draft to the Risk Management Workshop planned for 17th November 2021. The report also identified that there were currently no priority 1 recommendations to be addressed.

One Member asked about the briefing notes produced by TIAA on developments in governance, risk and control, as listed in Appendix C of the report and asked why some of these were highlighted as red. Mr Maddock replied that red indicators signified that the Authority should take action on these matters, and noted that some Authorities provided an update to Members to give assurance that the work had been undertaken and the risk minimised. Officers advised that where action was required, this had been undertaken, however it was requested that an update, indicating what action had been carried out, be provided for Members in future reports.

Members thanked Mr Maddock for his report.

NOTED.

5. Budget Performance Report for 6 months to September 2021

The report of the Finance Manager set out the detailed net revenue budget for the six months to September 2021 which showed the actual and committed expenditure was £2,193k, £544k (19.9%) under the profiled budget. The main reasons for the variance of actual expenditure against budget for each service department were set out in the report.

The forecast revenue position for the 2021/22 year end was expected to show an operating surplus of £595k, versus a nil surplus in the original budget. This variance was due mainly to income at centres and in relation to car parks being above that budgeted.



The capital programme had increased from the original budget due to an award from the Welsh Government under their Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places grant scheme, and projects rolled forward from the previous financial year, with details of the projects funded set out in the report.

Turning to the Authority's Reserves, it was reported that the general Reserve was expected to remain at £1,008k at the end of the current financial year with the forecasted surplus for the year being used to create additional earmarked reserves. Capital Receipts Reserves were expected remain at £370k.

Thanking the Finance Manager for a clear and positive report, one Member asked about the lessons for next year's budget, questioning whether some projects should be included within core funding where it was felt that they were of continued importance to the work of the Authority. The Finance Manager noted that the National Park Grant had, and would continue to diminish, and grant funding could not be guaranteed, however these trends would be highlighted in next month's budget workshop. The Chief Executive added that he was looking at whether certain projects should be integrated into the roles of permanent staff as part of the current work on the Authority's priorities.

Noting the current year's underspend in Development Management caused by an increase in fee income, other Members suggested that additional enforcement staff should be employed, as accordance with planning conditions was a key area on which the Authority was judged. The Chief Executive agreed to speak to the Director and Development Management Team Leader on this matter, but cautioned that many sections of the Authority were facing challenges in the current environment and that increases in one department could lead to cuts in another as employing additional staff had longer term implications.

Other questions related to the car park income, and the Finance Manager clarified that the 'Car Park Operations' income reflected receipts from season tickets. There was some discussion regarding the lack of mobile phone signal in some locations which meant that some people were unable to use the 'Pay by Phone' app to pay for their car park ticket, and it was questioned whether other options for paying by card could be considered. Officers replied that the cost of installing landlines to all pay and display machines was prohibitive, however the introduction of 'Pay by Phone' had generally been well received, particularly the cooperation with Pembrokeshire County Council in use of the same system. The Chief Executive agreed to speak to the relevant officer to see if there were any alternative options. It was also hoped that the situation regarding poor



signal strength would continue to be addressed by mobile phone operators.

Finally Members asked about the delay in delivery of electric vehicles ordered by the Authority and whether this posed any risk. Officers replied that they were in communication with both the grant funders and the manufacturers and it was expected that delivery would be made before the end of the financial year.

NOTED.

6. Risk Register

Members were asked to consider the latest risk register, which had been reviewed by the Leadership Team. The main changes from the previous report were highlighted, and it was noted that a Workshop would be held the following week when the register could be discussed in more detail with all Members.

Members raised a number of questions with regard to the risks, including those related to the significant risk of a reduction in funding (Risk 2), with the word significant being questioned, whether the wording relating to Ash Dieback adequately captured the ongoing nature of the risk (Risk 37), difficulties of mitigating the impact of COVID (Risk 38) and the wording of the new risk added to reflect the current changes being made to the IT system (Risk 42). It was also suggested that a new risk should be considered relating to a failure to achieve Net Zero by 2030. One Member highlighted the importance of Risk 9 with regard to loss of land in coastal areas as a result of the long term impact of climate change, due to the coastal nature of the National Park.

Officers replied that they considered the risk of future reductions in funding to be significant, however they would look at the wording of the other risks highlighted.

NOTED.

[The meeting was adjourned between 11.30 and 11.40am]

7. Performance Report for the Period ending 30 September 2021

The report followed the structure of the Corporate and Resources Plan for 2021/22. This followed the approach of the Well-being of Future Generations Act with seven well-being objectives, with an additional section providing general governance information. Activities responding to Covid 19 recovery had been mainstreamed into work streams under each of the well-being Objectives.



The report presented the performance to 30 September 2021 for monthly data and quarter 1 to quarter 2 (April – September) for quarterly statistics. Performance in respect of a number of work areas was highlighted, and the Performance and Compliance Coordinator pointed out a typographical error under the heading of Well-being Projects, where the project related to the First 1000, not 100, Days.

Members thanked the officer for a comprehensive report and were pleased to see that the Authority's work was beginning to return to some sort of normality, following the COVID pandemic.

NOTED

[Councillor P Baker tendered his apologies and left the meeting during consideration of the following report.]

8. Human Resources Report

The report, which was presented by the Chief Executive in the absence of the HR Manager, provided details of various Health and Safety, wellbeing and human resources indicators for the quarter, with comparison for previous quarters where available. It also summarised the work of the department in terms of policy development and other projects.

The Chief Executive answered a number of Members' questions regarding the reporting of near misses, succession planning, sickness absence, and health and safety, and an assurance was also provided that all statutory checks with regard to buildings in respect of the latter point had been carried out, as evidenced in the recent Internal Audit report (minute 4 refers). However a summary table could be provided for the next meeting.

NOTED.

9. Presentation on how the Authority has opened its sites safely and introduced measures to implement COVID protocols and requirements

This presentation, by the Visitor Services Manager North, focussed on the measures and arrangements at Castell Henllys, however she noted that similar processes were in place at both Carew and Oriel y Parc. The presentation highlighted the work that had been undertaken, and the resultant measures put in place through the different stages of the pandemic with risk assessments constantly reviewed and adaptations made to the site in order to manage the risk to both the onsite team and the public. It was noted that the site had now reopened fully, with a limited school's programme operating and other, mainly outdoor, activities and events taking place. A booking system had been introduced at the start of the pandemic and this had proved helpful to the team. Feedback



had generally been positive and most people were happy to comply with the requirements for booking, mask wearing and social distancing.

Members thanked the officer for a comprehensive presentation, and a number of them who had personal experience of visiting the site commended the staff and the safety measures put in place. One suggested that the atmosphere of the site had been improved by the limited numbers that were permitted, however it was questioned whether this had implications for its future. The Manager advised that the requirement for the public to book had provided better information regarding daily attendance and allowed better management of staff and therefore costs. The Chair thanked the Visitor Services teams across all the sites for their hard work.

NOTED.

10. Delegation of any issues for consideration by the Continuous Improvement Group

It was **RESOLVED** that there were no issues of concern that the Committee wished to delegate to the Continuous Improvement Group for consideration.

