

Draft Minutes

Governance and Audit Committee

Date: 29 September 2022

Time: 5:00pm

Venue: Council Chambers- Hybrid Meeting

Present: Mr G. Chapman (Chair), Dr. N. Barry, Mr D. Reed.
Councillors J. Jordan, G. Horton, R. Mogford and S. Cocks

In attendance: Andrew Wathan (Chief Internal Auditor), Dona Palmer (Audit Manager), Jan Furtek (Audit Manager), Gareth Lucey (Audit Wales), Paul Flint (Performance & Risk Business Partner), Tracy McKim (Head of People, Policy and Transformation), Janice Dent (Policy and Partnership Manager), Robert Green (Assistant Head of Finance), Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director – Transformation & Corporate Centre), Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance), Mark Bleazard (Digital Services Manager), Bridie Edwards (Complaints Resolution Manager).

Councillor Dimitri Batrouni- Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation (observing re Complaints Item)

Anne Jenkins (Governance Team Leader), Pamela Tasker (Governance Support Officer)
Councillor John Harris joined for the last 15 minutes of the committee.

1. Apologies for Absence

None received.

2. Declarations of Interest

None received.

3. Minutes of the last meeting: 28 July 2022

The Minutes of the previous meeting were accepted subject to the following:

Dr N Barry asked for her thanks to be noted for having an action list at the end of the minutes and also highlighted that two actions were missed: Item 7 SO24/Waiving of Contract SOs - 1) The Chief Internal Auditor would come back to the Committee once the system was reviewed by the service area on the new way of commissioning and, 2) To ensure that checking was in place for all contracts to be on the corporate contracts register.

4. Annual Report on Compliments, Comments and Complaints Management 2022

Mark Bleazard (Digital Services Manager) and Bridie Edwards (Complaint Resolution Manager), introduced the report to Committee Members.

In May 2021 the Council's Cabinet agreed the new Compliments, Comments and Complaints policy for the Council. As part of the requirements of the Governance and Audit Committee it was now responsible to make reports and recommendations in relation to the Authority's ability to handle complaints effectively.

This was the fourth annual report presented to Cabinet and second presented to Governance and Audit Committee; previously, the Audit Committee. The Team had moved from City Services to People, Policy & Transformation. There had been relatively new members to the team and training modules would be undertaken in the next financial year.

This report therefore provided an overview of all Corporate and Social Services compliments, comments and complaints during 2021/22. Complaints about schools were reported separately as they were subject to a distinct statutory framework; however, complaints about Education services such as administrative processes i.e., not receiving timely invites to Governor meetings were included.

The details within the report were broken down by service areas and complaint types. The report highlighted key trends and themes drawn from the data for consideration. In 2021/22 the Council received 208 compliments, 4267 comments and 321 complaints. 96% of complaints were resolved through the Council's complaints process. The Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) intervened with 4%. The PSOW expressed that the focus was not on keeping complaints to a minimum but giving customers various platforms in which to raise their concerns.

The report reflected on lessons learned for the Council to improve and actions to deliver these improvements. More engagement with service areas would ensure a deeper understanding of the work of the Ombudsman including their powers and overall goals but also the importance of more structured training which would be beneficial at both employee induction and on-going annual refresher training.

In addition to this, part of the teams' function was to develop further working relationships with services areas, to improve their confidence in complaint handling. Looking to improve reporting function and standardizing processes to capture the data accurately. Complaint Standards Authority (CSA) issues a model policy which involved us updating our policy. The impact on this was to work with other authorities.

The key focus area in development was through the new data analysis in partnership with the Newport Intelligence Hub as well as reviewing the Unacceptable Actions Policy, working closely with the Customer Contact Centre on how to work challenging communication styles.

M Bleazard also added that the PSOW advised there was no right or wrong answer in the number of call logs, therefore, to err on the side of caution all calls would be logged and

feedback accordingly. If there was any context as part of the overall Wales figures, these could be referred to the PSOW.

Comments from the Committee:

D Reed (Co-opted Member) referred to page 22, where it was mentioned issues with telephony services used by the contact centre staff and that the service provider would be undertaking a large system upgrade shortly to resolve the issues experienced by the residents of Newport; was this timetabled? B Edwards would provide feedback in relation to this.

Dr Barry (Co-opted Member) was looking for assurance in terms of lessons learned which were not in the report and although B Edwards covered this it would have been helpful if it was included. In addition to this, as a complainant, how would feedback be received. B Edwards advised that in terms of continuous improvement of services it was hoped that through working with the Newport Intelligence Hub this information could be harnessed to implement changes and feedback through the website, newsletters or updates on social media pages.

Dr Barry also noted that the PSOW provided various platforms to allow customers to submit their complaints, was this being done; was the Council's system accessible. B Edwards advised that this was accessible and there was an information section on the internet for customers on how to do this, such as telephone, drop-in sessions at the Civic Centre and Riverfront. As well as continuing to look into broadening accessibility for customers.

Councillor Horton asked if there could be clarity on the actions within the report, page 26. For example, if there was a date next to the action, was it on target to meet that date as well as the status on anything ongoing. M Bleazard advised that there was a lot of change ongoing, and the new staff were trying to do things properly, therefore there might be broadly a month leeway, but most actions were on track.

Councillor Cocks queried one graph regarding Social Services where complaints were low for the first three quarters then there was a spike in complaints, was this therefore accurate. M Bleazard was unable to give a specific response in terms of trend and were trying to get more to grips with insight.

Councillor Cocks also referred to a phrase on page 26 which advised there were too many options to close off complaints. B Edwards advised that this referred to My Council Services which was a software database, a technical system that had a number of categories that needed to be filled when closing down complaints, they were looking to reduce the categories to make the information clearer for reporting reasons.

The Chair asked the following:

- Were councillor complaints recorded on the system. B Edwards - yes they were.
- How many comments became complaints. B Edwards – not sure on this unless the data was broken down.

- What was the customer satisfaction in dealing with complaints. B Edwards - there was also a survey carried out in the past. This was something that could be looked into.
- Did complainants get any written feedback; if a complainant does not receive this information, they may think that their complaint had not been addressed which would discourage further complaint. B Edwards - each complaint that came through was acknowledged and responded to accordingly. An improvement needed to be made with regards to comments, however, yes they get a response letter at the end.
- Were complainants given a satisfaction questionnaire. B Edwards – they happened in the past but not at moment. It would however be looked into.
- What learning had been taken from complaints and had directorates actioned service delivery. M Bleazard - lacking in that intelligence in terms of the bigger picture of complaint and therefore regarding trends we needed to improve to understand the issues.
- Did the Council have a vexatious complainant's policy and had anyone been excluded from this. B Edwards – yes an Unacceptable Actions Policy was in place. There was a fine balance between services areas reminding customers of their conduct and the Complaints Department implementing any restrictions.
- Was there an opportunity for the POSW annual letter to be attached at the next report. B Edwards – yes this was noted.
- In relation to actions for improvement, could the Committee receive an update report in six months' time to cover this. M Bleazard – yes this was noted.

Councillor Cocks felt that it was easier to analyse the complaints resolution statistics and monitoring the quality of complaints was equally important. With this in mind, was there a monitoring of quality in place as well as statistics. The Equalities Impact Assessment, as referred to in the previous minutes was also an important part of the report, was the report author therefore meeting the legal requirements.

Councillor Cocks also asked if there was any indication as to the background of the people recording complaints, varying from age to ethnicity.

The Chair agreed with the points raised by Councillor Cocks and that more detail should be available within reports going forward. Tracy McKim, the Head of People, Policy and Transformation advised that the wording within the report was correct, as part of the Corporate template and that the FEIA section was specifically about decisions, as mentioned at the previous meeting. It also did mention that the figures were covered in the Strategic Equalities report. We could however put slightly more information within the report as requested.

Councillor Batrouni, observing this item referred to the overall issues raised by Committee Members and that in general, data helps us to understand further what complainants were telling us about the services which was key to understanding trends. It was important to treat complaints as a resource and provide detailed feedback to residents.

Resolved:

The Governance and Audit Committee considered the contents of the report regarding the process and performance of the Council's corporate compliments, comments and complaints annual report 2021/22 and make any recommendations for improvement to the annual report, which were noted in the Minutes.

5. Corporate Risk Register Update: Quarter 1

J Dent (Policy and Partnership Manager) presented the Committee with the report.

The Chair requested for future meetings could we have Officers full names as well as job titles provided on the name plates.

The Council's Corporate Risk Register monitored risks that may prevent the Council from achieving its Corporate Plan or delivering services to its communities and service users in Newport. At the end of quarter one, which was April to June 2022, there were 16 risks recorded in the Corporate Risk Register that were considered to have a significant impact on the achievement of the Council's objectives and legal obligations. At the end of quarter one there were no corporate risks closed. Overall, there were eight Severe risks (risk scores 15 to 25); eight Major risks (risk scores seven to 14); that are outlined in the report.

In comparison to the quarter four Corporate risk register, there were no new and/or escalated risks, and no risks were closed. One risk increased in risk score; one risk had decreased; with 4 risks remaining the same score. No risks were escalated or de-escalated in quarter one.

As set out in the Council's Risk Management Policy, Cabinet reviewed the Corporate Risk Register on a quarterly basis ensuring procedures were in place to monitor the management of significant risks. The Register was likely to change following the approval of the new Corporate Plan and priorities for service delivery.

P Flint (Performance and Research Business Partner) highlighted that there were 44 risks across the organisation as tabled within the report.

There were also three new service areas to be identified going forward in relation to risks.

Comments from the Committee:

Councillor Jordan referred to Page 38 – Cyber Security, asked for this to be indicated in the risk heat map. P Flint advised that it was an error within the report and confirmed that Cyber security should have appeared in the red category.

Dr Barry (Co-opted) asked if the target date for completion needed to be amended and, in some cases, the commentary relating to the mitigating action didn't link. Was the action therefore appropriate and were officers focused on achieving the outcomes the actions were leading to and felt there was a need to look at the narrative. In addition, there were no mitigation actions on some risks which was of concern, such as Education/Out of area placement for example, no commentary on balancing the Council's budget, City Security co-ordinated evacuation arrangements – completion date 31 March 2022. Dr Barry went on to list Climate Change and the Ebbw Vale Solar Farm Development, which was held up because of the local electricity network; should this have been considered before or during the planning stage. Finally, the pressure on Adult and Community Services, how was this stopping the assessment impact.

P Flint gave an overview in relation to the risks and the commentary supporting them. As there was a big review and detailed process of the risks, and as part of the process would be

looking at the actions some of the risks. It was correct that there were no actions against the highways network risk, some of this was having to accept the risk as part of that. There were already controls in place managing particular risks. In terms of the action's dates, to clarify, this is currently being reviewed to make sure that officers understand the completion and target dates.

T McKim added that officers understood what they were doing but it was not reflected on the system, because previously the actions had not been fully utilised within the system. The information was there but not recorded in the correct way.

D Barry understood and added that reports needed to be clear in relation to the actions, deadlines and what was being done for the purposes of the Governance and Committee. That narrative would therefore link back to the action. This would give an assurance to the Committee. P Flint took the comments on board.

The Chair reiterated Dr Barry's comments and if the narrative was not properly in place there was a likelihood that the Committee would look into what was happening. It was therefore essential that this was covered in future training for officers. J Dent advised that training for all officers would impact on all the issues covered and therefore assured the Chair that this would be put into practice although it may take a couple of months to achieve this.

Cllr Cocks commented on page 39 in relation to two social services risks where every quarter it was reported that the risk was at a maximum, did this mean that the service could no longer function. R Cornwall (Strategic Director) advised that the Committee were looking into whether the appropriate processes were in place and assurances around this. In relation to further training sessions, this represented the sharp end of the risk that the Council was dealing with this as were most councils in England and Wales regarding social care providers. A significant effort was given every day to managing those mitigating risks for individuals in receipt of social care. There was no magic wand in relation to those risks and Councillor Cocks was right to raise it. Whilst it was not within the remit of this Committee, it may be worth linking into the Scrutiny Committee papers that looked into which services areas were doing what to manage the risks on a yearly basis. This could give the Committee further context to the figures.

Councillor Cocks suggested maybe looking at a snapshot of the different areas to see how the Council managed some of the issues. R Cornwall mentioned that as this was a new Committee, under the Local Elections Wales Act, the Committee could look at identifying one of these areas as a risk on a trial basis.

P Flint was meeting with the Director of Social Services to look at the risks and ensure that they were being captured in the right way.

The Chair added that whilst these issues were being addressed by Cabinet or Scrutiny Committees. A short synopsis of the reports going up to these committees to provide an account on this for the Governance and Audit Committee would assure members on the actions to receive that assurance.

Resolved:

The Governance and Audit Committee considered the contents of the report and assessed the risk management arrangements for the Authority, providing any additional commentary and/or recommendations to Cabinet, which were noted in the Minutes.

6. Progress Against Internal Audit Plan 2022/23 Quarter 1

A Wathan, (Chief Internal Auditor) informed Members of the Council's Governance and Audit Committee of the Internal Audit Section's progress against the 2022/23 agreed Internal Audit plan for the first three months of the year by providing information on audit opinions given to date and progress against key performance targets.

The attached report identified that the Internal Audit Section was making progress against the 2022/23 audit plan and internal performance indicators. These were attached to the report as appendices, which were detailed and noted by the Committee.

Comments from the Committee:

Councillor Jordan referred to page 89 in relation to Transport, under City Services, follow up for 2021/22 was the unsatisfactory opinion for quarter four or quarter one. A. Wathan advised that it was regarding work that was started in 2021/22 which was completed in quarter one 2022/23 when a report was issued in draft; this resulted in a second unsatisfactory opinion which would be picked up in the second report on the Agenda.

D. Barry (Co-opted Member) noted positive feedback and asked was there also any negative feedback to balance this out. A. Wathan advised that at the end of an audit the team issue the final audit report to the relevant Head of Service, along with an audit evaluation questionnaire to be returned to the Chief Internal Auditor. The responses were collated and all commentary good and bad was assessed to see if improvement of service provision could be made across the board. Regarding any negative indications, the manager would be contacted and invited to meet to discuss improvements going forward.

Secondly, Dr Barry referred to training on Financial Regulations and Contract Standing Orders was self-nomination, why was this not compulsory. A Wathan advised that it was mandatory, and officers were encouraged to attend, including Heads of Service. Any unfavourable reporting, the Internal Audit team had concentrated training for those specific areas in the past.

For clarification: The self-nomination process has been adopted by the Council as a way of employees accessing appropriate training; the manager might require the employee to attend but the employee then books him / herself onto the relevant course through a digital process.

Dr Barry was concerned that self-nomination training was misleading, and it was therefore important to attend. A. Wathan would pick this up with colleagues in Human Resources.

The Chair reiterated Dr Barry's comments and felt that lack of attendance to these training sessions should be picked up/endorsed by the Committee and fed back to Corporate Management.

The Chair referred to the *Unsatisfactory* or *Unsound* opinions being followed up within a 12-month time scale. For some issues that were important for the Committee, would the Audit team have the capacity to have this checked sooner, such as three or six months, if it did impact on the citizens within Newport. A. Wathan agreed that this was a fair point and the team carried out follow ups as quickly as they could however the Audit team had relied on managers to advise if they had implemented the recommendations, unfortunately, this can often be the reason for the delays in undertaking further audit work. The Audit Team could emphasize this to managers and give a shorter timescale, but it may have the same result. Chair understood but considered that if managers had still not addressed this within timescales and would therefore pick it up in the next report. A. Wathan advised that it would be reported on a quarterly basis and updated.

The Chair also mentioned the Passenger Transport Unit (PTU) Taxi Contracts follow-up 2021/22 which was not on the list in the next report under the same year but was instead 2019/20, with the report being issued in October 2019. The Chair assumed that this was for the 2022/23 follow up and there was nothing undertaken in 2021/22. D Palmer advised that the work was started in 2021/22 but the report was issued in draft in the current year – 2022/23. The 2019/20 year was when the original audit was carried out.

Dr Barry referred to the achievements to date and mentioned that it was good to see that all the reports were completed within the timescale. The Chair agreed with these comments 9% above the original target was an achievement and thanked the Audit Team.

Resolved:

The Governance and Audit Committee noted the report.

7. Audit Wales Fee Consultation

The covering report and Appendix 1 outlined Audit Wales proposed fees for 2023/24. A 5.5% increase was proposed to cover inflationary and pay pressures within Audit Wales. In addition, an increase of between 12% and 18% would be implemented to reflect the added costs of adhering to a revised auditing standard (ISA315). There was also a proposal to reduce local performance audit fees by approximately one third.

Audit Wales were required therefore to consult with Local Authorities regarding the proposed fees structure for the forthcoming financial year.

M Rushworth (Head of Finance) advised there was significant change regarding cost. There were also professional changes to the way Audit Wales would carry out their audit, requiring more qualified and experience staff to take a risk-based approach to auditing, hence the rise in cost. Consideration could be given to putting efforts in place to make the Council less risky to avoid incurring these costs. The Council could therefore consider this approach.

It was noted however that in the report, responses were required by 16 September 2022, the deadline of which had passed.

Gary Lucey (Audit Wales) added that consultation had formally closed but further comments were still welcomed, and this information would be shared at the highest level. The main issue was the fundamental overhaul of Standard (ISA315) and to implement this standard and deliver audit to LAs under this framework. There was an opportunity to identify potential efficiencies and it could actually mean that the fee increase would be less than the expected estimate.

Comments from the Committee:

Dr Barry (Co-opted member) asked was it the intention of Audit Wales and the Council for the Committee to respond considering the deadline date had expired. M Rushworth advised that this was the intention, however the consultation commenced in August and this was the first opportunity for it to be discussed at the Governance and Audit Committee.

Dr Barry mentioned that the difficulty was not knowing enough regarding this report and suggested it would have been useful to see a draft of proposals. M Rushworth advised that the draft document would be circulated to the Committee, to provide quick turnaround for feedback.

Councillor Jordan asked where the money would come from. M Rushworth provided an estimated breakdown of costs, with the estimated outcome providing a broad match. If however, this did not happen and there was an increase in the audit fees, the revenue cost would be absorbed and funded through the Council's revenue budget, this would be a pressure on the MTFP in the next financial year.

Councillor Horton asked what was the cost breakdown of auditors that the Council made use of and could there be a cost saving by not using senior auditors. M Rushworth advised that these would be the expected comments to be included in the consultation.

Councillor Horton also asked if the Council would challenge any high costs. M Rushworth agreed that this would be the case.

Councillor Horton asked would the Committee receive any feedback where cost savings were made, if challenged. M Rushworth would bring the report back to Committee annually on the audit fee with key decisions made with Audit Wales which would result in the final agreement. G Lucey was also keen to inform the Committee on how this would be progressing and the effects in relation to the fees and significant developments throughout the year.

The Chair noted that whilst the closing date had passed and comments would be fed back, if this was to happen again, could a special Committee be held in the future. This was agreed by M Rushworth and G Lucey.

The Chair also asked if there was a political or management view coming from the Authority and felt it should be considered by Cabinet. M Rushworth advised that it was only coming to this committee at this point and not shared within the wider team. It would however be shared with respective Cabinet Member.

In response to the Chair observing that LAs had no control in relation to legislation being piloted by Senedd a cost to Local Authorities as well as no value for money; Local Authorities could not go anywhere else for this service. G Lucey advised that this was an Internal Standard on auditing and was not from Welsh Government. It was felt that Audit Wales had a good working relationship with management and if there were significant changes, this would be communicated at the earliest opportunity.

Resolved:

- The Governance and Audit Committee noted the proposals and the likely cost impact. The Head of Finance would circulate the Audit Wales document with a quick turnaround.
- That future Special Committees would be held within consultation deadlines.

8. Internal Audit Annual Plan Progress against unfavourable Audit Opinions

The report identified current progress of systems or establishments which were previously given an *Unsatisfactory* or *Unsound* audit opinion. Whilst there would always be concerns over reviews given an *Unsatisfactory* or *Unsound* audit opinion, managers were allowed sufficient time to address the issues identified and improve the financial / administrative internal controls within their areas of responsibility. The previous report was presented in January 2022 and related to opinions issued to September 2021. This report relates to opinions up to 31 March 2022.

The Governance and Audit Committee were provided with a breakdown of figures:

During **2018/19**, 48 audit opinions had been issued; 10 were *Unsatisfactory*, 1 was *Unsound*.

During **2019/20**, 32 audit opinions had been issued; 6 were *Unsatisfactory*, none were *Unsound*.

During **2020/21**, 29 audit opinions had been issued; 1 was *Unsatisfactory*, none were *Unsound*.

During **2021/22**, 35 audit opinions had been issued; 2 were *Unsatisfactory*, none were *Unsound*.

The history of unfavourable audit opinions from 2015/16 to 2021/22, which were tabled within the report were highlighted, followed by the report Appendices, in particular, Appendix B, Adoption Allowances, where the Audit team changed their opinion. J Furtek (Audit Manager), confirmed the second follow-up review had commenced and they had met with service managers recently. Things had improved, with procedures and policies as well as a back-up plan. With this in mind the outlook was looking more favourable, but whilst management comments were being chased to finalise the report, Internal Audit were informed that no work was being undertaken with Adoption Allowances due to a lack of resource. The opinion was therefore revised to *Unsatisfactory*. On that basis, A Wathan advised the Committee to consider calling in the respective head of service to the next Governance & Audit Committee meeting.

Comments from the Committee:

Councillor Jordan agreed with A Wathan's recommendation but with some lenience. Would this come back to Committee in Quarter 2 to discuss improvement and if not, to invite the service manager back in Quarter 3. A Wathan advised that the review would be discussed at the next meeting and they would be invited to the following Committee if the outcome was still *Unsatisfactory*. Councillor Jordan agreed that if there was a prompt to be brought in at the next meeting, it might be addressed by the following quarter.

Councillor Cocks referred to Housing Benefits and asked when would the Audit team be expected to get back to Housing Benefits. A Wathan advised that the team would revisit within a 12 month period. It was in the plan for 2022/23 and would therefore be addressed in this financial year.

Dr Barry was concerned about findings and referred to paragraph 16 in relation to training within these areas. This raised an awareness of weaknesses at an administrative level, therefore how effective was senior and middle management and who was monitoring the cultural issue. A Wathan advised he was unable to comment and that as an internal auditor, the Internal Audit team could only look at each service area that they are auditing and the information in front of them in terms of evidence identified.

Councillor Cocks mentioned, in relation to Housing Benefit, that the report was in depth, which ensured council services were running properly. Councillor Cocks felt that it should not take Internal Audit to identify these issues and wondered what quality assurance and management issues were taking place.

Councillor Horton asked if Internal Audit had picked up anything good in relation to the audit. A Wathan advised that there was a balanced review in everything that was audited, and strengths and weaknesses were identified. Unfortunately, in relation to Housing Benefits, the weaknesses outweighed the strengths. A Wathan added that in relation to Housing Benefits payment, that was not delayed, this instead was in relation to information collated on the housing side. Councillor Horton strongly agreed with the Chair that the service area was brought into the Committee.

D Reed (Co-opted member) understood that there may be some frustration with Internal Audit when management did not adhere to timescales and wondered if the Committee should have a quality quasi-Standing Order where managers were required to attend the next meeting to put their reasons forward.

The Chair expressed his dissatisfaction regarding the lapsed timelines and referred to the Newport Norse audit where there was a follow up delay of nearly seven years; since 2015. The Chair understood the issues around it however if there was an *Unsatisfactory* outcome in the report, this would need to be addressed as quickly as possible.

In relation to PTU Taxi Contracts, there was a second *Unsatisfactory* outcome and following this, the head of service should be asked to attend Committee, following on from D Reed's earlier comment. In 2018/19 the vehicle tracking system was *Unsatisfactory* in October 2019. Again, issues were over three years old.

Corporate Governance had an *Unsatisfactory* outcome in 2020. The NCC Dogs Home follow up delay was due to low levels of staff. In relation to the Housing Benefit service area, the Chair was pleased that the delay was not to do with making payments.

There was a typing error in Appendix B typo third para where it should have read there were no resources.

The Chair considered that with regards to any unfavourable audit options, the Cabinet Member, Strategic Director and Chief Executive should be called in to discuss these issues. This would show that the Governance and Audit Committee were giving a strong message to the Council that this was not acceptable and that changes needed to be addressed. A separate meeting could be held to discuss these issues.

R Cornwall, Strategic Director advised that with regard to calling in the respective Cabinet Member it would need to be checked if this was within the remit of the Committee as it related to operational matters rather than policy matters. The Chair could however write to the Cabinet Member.

R Cornwall also asked the Chair to consider escalation points, where there were two *Unsatisfactory* Audits, the Head of Service be called in first, then consideration be given for separate meetings to call in the Chief Executive and the Strategic Director.

With the Strategic Director's suggestions in mind, the Chair would write to the Cabinet Member and Chief Executive following these concerns.

Resolved:

1. The Governance and Audit Committee noted and endorsed the report as well as raising their serious concerns.
2. The Governance & Audit Committee recommended calling in the Head of Service responsible for the Adoption Allowances service provision on the basis of a second consecutive *Unsatisfactory* Audit opinion, as this gave cause for concern.
3. The Governance and Audit Committee also considered calling in any other service areas, where there was a second Unsatisfactory Audit opinion, such as Passenger Transport Unit – Taxi Contracts.

9. Work Programme

The purpose of a forward work programme was to help ensure Members achieve organisation and focus on the undertaking of enquiries through the Governance and Audit Committee function. The report presented the current work programme to the Committee for information and detailed the items due to be considered at the Committee's next two meetings.

M Rushworth referred to the Audit of Financial Statements Report 2021/22 was going to the October Committee to be signed off. There was however a national issue concerning the evaluation of infrastructure assets on Local Authority accounts. This was initially raised in England but has now transferred to Wales. CIPFA had tried to amend the accounting code as a work around which had not been successful to date. All devolved UK governments were putting in regulations to override accounting issue.

With this in mind, it was not possible to get the accounts finalised in time for the October Committee and only a verbal prediction might be provided. G Lucey, Audit Wales, also reiterated that this was a national issue.

The Chair asked would an extra meeting be held, or would the report be discussed in January 2023, if the papers were available. WG were considering changing the official deadlines, M Rushworth advised that it was possible to deal with in January, although it was taking focus away from team who were under a lot of pressure. M Rushworth was therefore tempted to call a meeting to get it resolved but it was hoped that there would be a clearer indication at the next Committee in October.

Resolved:

That the Governance and Audit Committee endorse the Work Programme and await an update from the Head of Finance in relation to the Audit of Financial Statements Report 2021/22.

