

Report to the Audit and Governance Committee



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report reference: AGC-009-2017/18
Date of meeting: 18 September 2017

Portfolio: Technology and Support Services

Subject: Audit & Governance Committee Training Programme.

Responsible Officer: Sarah Marsh (01992 564446).

Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) That the training sessions for the Committee for the next 12 months as set out below, be agreed:

- (a) November 2017 – Role of the Audit Committee, incorporating an interactive session facilitated by the Chief Internal Auditor in order for the Committee to gauge its own effectiveness;**
- (b) February 2018 – Project Management, including a demonstration of the Council’s Project Management and Performance System (Covalent);**
- (c) March 2018 – Risk Management, to coincide with the Committee’s Effectiveness of Risk Management review;**
- (d) June 2018 – Assurance Framework, ahead of the Committee’s approval of the Annual Governance Statement; and**
- (e) September 2018 – How to Read a Set of Accounts, ahead of the Committee receiving the Statutory Statement of Accounts for 2017/18; and**

(2) That the Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee has delegated authority to approve the training programme for the Committee in future years.

Executive Summary:

This report provides details of the skills and knowledge analysis for the Committee and considers suggested subjects for training sessions to take place prior to committee meetings, which will be open to all members (as well as those councils in the Internal Audit partnership).

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The training programme as set out in this report assists the Audit and Governance Committee in discharging their duties as set out in their Terms of Reference. Regular briefings or training will ensure committee members keep up to date or extend their knowledge.

Other Options for Action:

None

Report:

Skills and Knowledge Analysis

1. At its November 2016 meeting the Audit and Governance Committee, whilst reviewing its effectiveness, agreed there was a range of knowledge and experience that audit committee members can bring to the committee to enable it to perform effectively. No one committee member would be expected to be expert in all areas, but there are core areas of knowledge that committee members will need to acquire through training or briefings.

2. A questionnaire was circulated to all committee members to evaluate its overall knowledge and skills, which in turn would be used to guide members on their training needs. Whilst to date only three questionnaires have been completed, the results confirm the committee does indeed collectively have a wide range of skills and experiences including both the public and private sector. There was no one area that lacked collective knowledge or experience although respondents requested training or an update on financial management and accounting, the work of assurance providers (including Internal Audit) and IT systems and IT governance.

Training Programme

3. It is proposed that a 30 minute training session is delivered prior to each Audit and Governance Committee, in line with the other Audit Committees in the Internal Audit shared service. Such training would consist of short topical briefings by Council officers with input, where appropriate, from the external auditors.

4. Specific training topics should be determined in consultation with the Chairman to co-ordinate with relevant agenda items and the needs of committee members. Where appropriate, certain topics would be revisited to provide an update or refresher for members. Possible training topics could include:

- Annual accounts – external audit perspective and external audit plan.
- Anti-Fraud and Corruption.
- Assurance frameworks and the Annual Governance Statement.
- Audit and Governance functions.
- Contract Standing Orders and procurement legislation.
- Financial Regulations.
- Information management, security and data quality.
- Principles of good governance.
- Reviewing the annual accounts.
- Risk management.
- Role of Internal and External Audit.
- Value for Money.
- Treasury Management.
- Project Management.

5. The Council already provides a number of training events that are open to all Members, including Risk Management and Treasury Management.

6. In order to obtain the maximum benefit from the training provided, all members of the Council would be invited to attend if they wish (and where appropriate members from

neighbouring Councils). This will assist in mainstreaming the Committee's activities and may help to identify potential future members of the Committee. Training opportunities at Broxbourne and Harlow will continue to be offered to Epping Forest Councillors.

7. The following training programme spanning the next 12 months is proposed:

- November 2017 – role of the Audit Committee incorporating an interactive session facilitated by the Chief Internal Auditor in order for the Committee to gauge its own effectiveness.
- February 2018 – project management including a demonstration of the Council's project management and performance system (Covalent).
- March 2018 – risk management to coincide with the Committee's effectiveness of risk management review.
- June 2018 – assurance framework ahead of the Committee's approval of the Annual Governance Statement.
- September 2018 – how to read a set of Accounts, ahead of the committee receiving the 2017/18 Statement of Accounts.

Resource Implications:

There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The fulfilment of a training programme will assist the Council in meeting a number of legal obligations including the consideration and approval of the Annual Statement of Accounts and the Annual Governance Statement.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

None

Consultation Undertaken:

The results of a skills and knowledge questionnaire completed by Members of the Audit and Governance Committee formed the basis of this report.

Background Papers:

Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police (2013 Edition)

Risk Management:

There are no direct risk management implications arising from the recommendations.

The operation of an effective audit committee provides assurance on the effective management of governance risks and internal controls. Implementation of a training plan allows members to fulfil this assurance role.

Equality Analysis:

The Equality Act 2010 requires that the Public Sector Equality Duty is actively applied in decision-making. This means that the equality information provided to accompany this report is essential reading for all members involved in the consideration of this report. The equality information is

provided at Appendix 1 to the report.