

Meeting	Audit And Governance Committee
Date	17 March 2025
Present	Councillors Hollyer (Chair), J Burton (Vice-Chair), Fisher, Merrett, Rose, Coles And Watson
Officers in Attendance	Bryn Roberts – Monitoring Officer Debbie Mitchell – Director of Finance Lindsay Tomlinson – Head of Democratic Services Ian Cunningham - Head of Business Intelligence Emma Calvert - Electoral Services Manager
In Attendance	Mark Outterside - Director, Forvis Mazars Max Thomas - Head of Internal Audit, Veritau Connor Munro - Assistant Director – Audit Assurance, Veritau Jonathan Dodsworth, Assistant Director – Corporate Fraud, Veritau
Apologies	Mr Myles Binney

Part A Minute

64. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (17:30)

It was confirmed that apologies had been received from the Committee's independent member Myles Binney.

65. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (17:31)

Members were asked to declare any personal interests not included on the Register of Interests, any prejudicial interests or any disclosable pecuniary interests which they may have in respect of business on the agenda. None were declared.

66. MINUTES & ACTION LOG (17:32)

The Monitoring Officer confirmed to the Committee that the Constitution review was an ongoing process and noted that the advert for a new independent member of the Committee was live. He agreed to provide updates to the committee on action 80 on Corporate Governance Team Report, he confirmed that Aldermen and Alderwomen would be informed of Council dates, and that an update would be provided to the Committee on when the audit report into the Council's extension and subsequent termination of the Early Intervention and Prevention Contract with the Salvation Army.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held 29 January 2025 on be approved and then signed by the Chair as a correct record.

67. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (17:38)

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

68. POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACE REVIEW (17:38)

The Head of Democratic Governance introduced the report, noting that the Council had a statutory duty to review polling districts and polling places. It was confirmed that the Council undertook an accessibility audit after a recent set of elections, and it was confirmed that most issues raised could be mitigated. It was also noted that the recommendation was for the Committee to commend the changes to Council, and that with power be delegated to the Chief Operating Officer to make changes in cases where urgent changes might be required.

The Committee discussed the proposed changes to polling districts and polling places. Members discussed proposed changes in relation to several areas such as Portland Street, Danesgate, and Ouse Lea. Members enquired about the moving of CD polling district to Moor Lane Youth Centre and whether there were other suitable options. Officers confirmed that they would review the options for moving CD and would consult Ward Councillors on proposals. The Committee also raised concerns at the lack of appropriate locations for polling

places around Beckfield Lane and Knapton, especially as new housing developments progress. Members also raised questions relating to the number of electors listed in Stockton on the Forest and it was confirmed Officers would review this against the electoral register to ensure its data is correct. The Committee also noted the opportunity when amending boundaries to try and include information encouraging people to get valid ID for voting.

Members welcomed the accessibility audit that was undertaken and were reassured that polling places that had not been audited during the election, had now been audited.

The Committee discussed the Community Governance Review (CGR) process, which had been raised in some of the consultation responses. It was confirmed that the statutory timeframe for completing a CGR was 12 months from the point of agreeing terms of reference to approving a final Structural Changes Order. The Committee requested that a report be presented to a future meeting, setting out details of the process that would be required along with anticipated costs.

Resolved:

- i. Noted the Polling District and Polling Place Review.

Reason: To comply with statutory requirements and to give better flexibility with making decisions regarding polling places between statutory reviews.

69. YORK OPEN DATA UPDATE (18:24)

The Head of Business Intelligence gave a presentation to the Committee on York Open Data. He confirmed that York Open Data had been set up with grant funding and now ran on a very low cost. It was also confirmed that consultations with users was build into the system with users directed to provide feedback via email.

The Committee discussed the uses of Open Data and praised the Ward Profiles section. Improvements to usability was considered such as being able to make more data preview-able rather than needing to download files. It was confirmed that the current platform could make some of the changes discussed by

Members but that solutions existed these would however, in some cases cost a lot more than the Council's current budget for operating York Open Data.

The Committee also debated whether more should be done to limit who might access and use the data, if it was not focused on supporting the work of the Council or communities in the city. Officers noted that most data sets were available on the platform, and it was difficult to see who used it, they did however, note that the data was provided transparency and had no evidence that the data had been sold or used to make commercial products. Members also made note that the data did not include information that might relate directly to individuals.

Members considered how the Council might manage and potentially grow its use of York Open Data. Officers noted that the Council had an initial strategy when it received funding to develop the open data platform, but this strategy had elapsed. The Committee agreed that a new strategy could be explored for the use of York Open Data.

Resolved:

- i. To request that Officers explore with the Executive the creation of a new strategy for developing the Council's York Open Data platform.

Reason: To promote transparency and the use of data in decision making.

70. KEY CORPORATE RISKS MONITOR 3 (18:46)

The Director of Finance introduced the report on the Key Corporate Risks Monitor 3. The Committee considered how the monitor presented risks, and it was confirmed that this could be reviewed to better represent the types of risks associated with each item while potentially grouping together similar lower-level risks. Members also raised concerns around complying with the Parish Charter and the Monitoring Officer confirmed that he would review this as part of the Council's governance review, which he noted could be added as an update to the Committee's work plan.

Resolved:

- i. Noted the Key Corporate Risk Register;
- ii. Noted the in-depth review of KCR 1;
- iii. To add an update on the Council's governance review to the Committee's work plan;
- iv. To request that the risk monitor be reviewed to provide greater detail of the types of risks associated with each item and how some similar low-level risks might be grouped together.

Reason: To provide assurance that the authority is effectively understanding and managing its key risks.

71. AUDITOR'S ANNUAL REPORT & FEE VARIANCE LETTER (19:07)

Mark Outterside from Forvis Mazars introduced the Auditors Annual Report and the letter on variance of fees. The Committee discussed the increase in auditor fees and enquired as to whether this would result in the Council reviewing more auditing work, considering the increase in fees. It was confirmed that fees were set by the PSAA (Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd) and not by Mazars, that fees were going up across the country due to the amount of audit work required in local government compared to the number of auditors working in the sector.

Resolved:

- i. Noted the matters set out in the Annual Report and Fee Variance letter presented by the external auditor.

Reason: To ensure the proper consideration of the work of the external auditor in respect of the annual audit of accounts and review of the council's arrangements for ensuring value for money. To ensure communication of variations to the scale fee for 2023/24 as required by the PSAA's terms of appointment.

72. INTERNAL AUDIT WORK PROGRAMME (19:18)

Connor Munro and Max Thomas from Veritau introduced the report. Members discussed the current programme of audit work, and it was confirmed that Veritau over-programme to ensure there is always audit work available to be undertaken. It was also noted that the programme could be modified should the Committee or the Council highlight areas it felt required auditing.

The Committee discussed the current programme of work and raised several areas they felt could require auditing. Members noted the rising costs in major projects, and it was confirmed that Veritau had audit work on both major projects and the gate way project management process. Members enquired about the quality of data and whether the Council was collating the right sort of up-to-date data and it was confirmed that an audit was planned on Data Quality.

Resolved:

- i. Approved the 2025/26 internal audit work programme.

Reason: In accordance with the committee's responsibility for overseeing the work of internal audit service.

73. 2025/26 COUNTER FRAUD PLAN (19:29)

Max Thomas and Jonathan Dodsworth from Veritau introduced the report which included work on updating the Council's whistleblowing policy, a new approach to council tax compliance, and corporate transparency. It was also confirmed that Veritau would consider the Anti-fraud policy review to ensure that the Council was meeting current legislation and best practice. Members enquired about new Government Guidance relating to countering fraud that was expected to be released. Veritau confirmed that the Council should be in a good place in relation to any changes due to its continued investment in counter fraud work, but an update would be provided to the Committee following new legislation.

Members enquired about blue badge fraud in terms of controlling eligibility, while ensuring eligible individuals can

access a blue badge. It was confirmed that the Council sets its own policies for counter fraud work and that issues relating to blue badges were usually related to being used by those that were not the permit holder and not in the application process.

Resolved:

- i. Noted the 2025/26 fraud risk assessment;
- ii. Noted the counter fraud development and work plans.

Reason: To enable members to consider the current risk of fraud against the council, this forms part of the committee's responsibility for overseeing the effectiveness of counter fraud arrangements.

74. AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE WORK PLAN (19:42)

The Committee considered its current work plan. Members enquired about whether there would be lessons and new ways of working for the Audit and Governance Committee following the review of Scrutiny. The Monitoring Officer agreed that a report could be brought to the Committee looking at new ways of working for the Committee.

Resolved:

- i. Noted the Committee work plan.

Reason: To ensure the Committee maintains a programme of work.

Part B Minute – Referred to Council

68. POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACE REVIEW (17:38)

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power be delegated to the Chief Operating Officer to make changes in cases where urgent changes might be required.

The Committee discussed the proposed changes to polling districts and polling places. Members discussed proposed changes in relation to several areas such as Portland Street, Danesgate, and Ouse Lea. Members enquired about the moving of CD polling district to Moor Lane Youth Centre and whether there were other suitable options. Officers confirmed that they would review the options for moving CD and would consult Ward Councillors on proposals. The Committee also raised concerns at the lack of appropriate locations for polling places around Beckfield Lane and Knapton, especially as new housing developments progress. Members also raised questions relating to the number of electors listed in Stockton on the Forest and it was confirmed Officers would review this against the electoral register to ensure its data is correct. The Committee also noted the opportunity when amending boundaries to try and include information encouraging people to get valid ID for voting.

Members welcomed the accessibility audit that was undertaken and were reassured that polling places that had not been audited during the election, had now been audited.

The Committee discussed the Community Governance Review (CGR) process, which had been raised in some of the consultation responses. It was confirmed that the statutory timeframe for completing a CGR was 12 months from the point of agreeing terms of reference to approving a final Structural Changes Order. The Committee requested that a report be presented to a future meeting, setting out details of the process that would be required along with anticipated costs.

Recommended:

- ii. That Council agree the final recommendations to the polling places and districts as set out in Annex 1 of this report until the next statutory review, or until it is superseded by any subsequent review of any polling place or district;
- iii. That Council agree to publish the revised electoral register on 1 May 2025. (Where the ERO has decided to revise their register by republishing it to incorporate the changes, the law requires that they

- publish a notice 14 calendar days before the publication of the revised version of the register in a local newspaper, at their office and at some other conspicuous place or places in the area);
- iv. That Council agree to delegate to the Chief Operating Officer, in their capacity as the Council's Returning Officer, the power to make urgent changes to the polling scheme during a statutory election period, where time does not permit a report to be presented to the Audit and Governance Committee. Where such urgent changes are proposed, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee will be consulted, along with the relevant ward councillors. This will ensure that polling arrangements in the City remain fit for purpose for each election called.

Reason: To comply with statutory requirements and to give better flexibility with making decisions regarding polling places between statutory reviews.

Cllr Hollyer, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.30 pm and finished at 7.55 pm].