

## **AUDIT COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Audit Committee held on Wednesday 19 November 2025 at 6.00 pm in Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford, TF3 4JG**

**Present:** Councillors H Morgan (Chair), C Chikandamina (Vice-Chair) and N A M England

**In Attendance:** M Brockway (Director: Finance, People & IDT), J Clarke (Senior Democracy Officer (Democracy)), T Drummond (Principal Auditor), A Lowe (Director: Policy & Governance), R Montgomery (Head of Audit, Governance & Procurement) and E Rushton (Head of Finance)

**Apologies:** Councillors G Luter and L Parker

#### **AU18      Declarations of Interest**

None.

#### **AU19      Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 July 2025 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

#### **AU20      Annual Customer Feedback Reports for 2024-25**

The Service Delivery Manager: Customer Relationships and Welfare Services presented the Annual Customer Feedback Reports for 2024-25 which set out details of customer feedback received between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. The report set out details regarding compliments and complaints that had been received during the reporting period and explained that the Council had adopted the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code prior to it being a requirement.

Following a rigorous assessment, the Council had recently become the first Local Authority to receive a ServiceMark accreditation from the Institute of Customer Services (ICS) which recognised the Council's commitment to upholding high standards. The Institute's work had been benchmarked against both public and private sectors.

Customer satisfaction rates had improved from 72.1 in 2022 to 74 making the Council's results comparable with leading organisations such as Amazon and John Lewis. The Net Promoter Score increased from 18 to 19.4, indicating a higher likelihood of customers recommending services, and the Customer Effort Score was 4.3, better than other councils at 5.8 with the public sector average score of 4.5 and the commitment to customer service excellence was evident in its strategic day-to-day operations.

Compliments had shown a sustained increase of 128% over six years with a 17% increase during the previous 12 months. There had been 790 statutory complaints received in 2024/25 up from the 735 complaints received during the previous year, comprising a small percentage of the thousands of daily interactions that took place.

The Customer Insight Programme engaged 235 volunteers for mystery shopping, completing 158 assignments with 86% satisfaction rate and there had been a 9% increase in the number of volunteers.

Contact centre performance remained excellent, with 98% customer satisfaction on telephone calls. Compliments and complaints were managed alongside Leader, Cabinet and MP enquiries. There were 796 Cabinet and Leader enquiries with 90% being responded to within deadline. A total of 302 ward member enquiries were received, a 9% increase, with 91% being responded to within timescales and 253 MP enquiries had been received with 88% responded to within timescales.

Corporate complaints rose to 710 from 659 the previous year, with 281 being upheld, a 2% reduction from the previous year. Common issues included poor communication, conduct, lack of action, incomplete work, and delays. Despite the increase, average response times improved to eight working days compared to ten previously. A total of 13% were escalated to Stage 2 (91 cases), a 30% increase, but upheld cases reduced from 50% to 26%. Average completion time was 31 days, within the 20–40 days as set out in the Code. Despite this, two complex cases exceeded the timescales. No major trends were identified across teams.

Across the 219 managed housing properties, five complaints had been received and responded to within the Housing Ombudsman Code.

Adult Social Care recorded 57 complaints, up from 39 the previous year, with 44% upheld which was down from the previous year. Average response times had reduced to 24 days from 29. Children's Services recorded 23 complaints of which 43% were upheld, with an average response time of 14 days. Four complaints escalated to Stage 2; three were not upheld, and one escalated to Stage 3 and was upheld against historical standards. Learning actions had been implemented and details were set out in the report. Ofsted had rated Children's Services as Outstanding. The LGSCO annual review noted 30 new enquiries with 16 relating to statutory complaints. Of these enquiries, 21 were not investigated, nine investigated with three upheld, and six mirrored previous findings which had been fully implemented.

During the debate, Members welcomed the thorough report which demonstrated that the Council was very open to feedback with compliments and complaints showing that this was working. They were heartened to hear that each complaint was looked into and any learning taken away and implemented. In relation to complaints, how did the Council ensure that the process remained accessible to all service users ie capacity, language and digital exclusion and was any learning taken from the 112 compliments that

had been received. Other questions were raised relating to the trialling of AI and developing learning from customer feedback and the use of Ask Tom.

The Service Delivery Manager: Customer Relationships and Welfare Services explained that complaints could be taken in a number of ways, including in cases where dissatisfaction was expressed verbally, this would be recorded and logged so that the service was accessible for the complainant. Internally the Council continued to explore AI via the AI Governance Board who looked at the opportunities and risks. The organisation already had some AI solutions in place, including Copilot, and Magic Notes was currently being trialled in key services for the purpose of producing notes of meetings. Throughout all of the activity discussed in the report, best practice was shared including examples of exceptional service as well as areas where the experience may have fallen short.

The Director: Policy & Governance explained that Ask Tom was the primary customer-facing contact mechanism but that other contact routes remained in place and the Council had been clear that it would not remove other options for contacting the Council. It was also confirmed that the Council continued to explore new opportunities for the use of AI in a proportionate and ethical way to ensure that any risks were appropriately managed. More recently, the introduction of Magic Notes had led to better records of interactions and interviews in such areas as social care and were very useful in recording, transcribing and taking minutes of meetings.

Upon being put to the vote it was, unanimously:

**RESOLVED – that:**

- a) Telford & Wrekin Council had been awarded ServiceMark accreditation by The Institute of Customer Services. The first Council to achieve a ServiceMark, this recognised excellence in customer service standards across the public and private sector and that this be noted;**
- b) the Customer Feedback Reports for 2024-25 in respect of Adult Statutory Complaints, Children's Statutory Complaints and Corporate Customer Feedback, and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Review Letter 2025 be reviewed; and**
- c) the improvement in complaint handling performance and the increase in positive feedback be noted.**

**AU21      Annual Auditors Report 2024/25 - interim version**

Mr R Walton, from KPMG, presented the External Auditors' Report which set out the legal requirements for reporting their findings by the end of November in any given year with the deadline for the audit being completed and accounts signed off by the end of February 2026. Work was still ongoing and, once completed, details would be published on the Council's website.

The report set out the executive summary of the key outcomes together with external audit opinion which was in line with internal audit standards. In relation to the commentary, no material inconsistencies had been identified. In respect of value for money, no significant weakness had been identified in the Council's arrangements during the work that had been completed thus far. The executive summary also set out actions available as part of their wider powers and it was confirmed that no actions had been taken during the current year.

In relation to Value for Money, the work had now been completed and full details were set out in the report. A risk assessment had also been completed in order to look at the Council's financial position which considered three key areas – financial stability, governance and economy, efficiency and effectiveness and that no weaknesses in these areas had been identified.

During the debate, some Members welcomed the report commenting it was important to maintain the standards of previous audits. Good risk mitigation and financial sustainability were not taken for granted and this showed in the work that was undertaken by the Council in respect of its budget management.

The report was for noting.

## **AU22      Internal Audit Activity Report**

The Principal Auditor presented the Internal Audit Activity Report which set out the work of the Internal Audit team from July 2025 to October 2025.

During the reporting period there had been a total of six internal audit reports issued with the report setting out more detail regarding these. Section 3.8 of the report set out the status of audits previously reported with six of the reports now holding a green (good) grading.

An update was provided in relation to work required to complete the Annual Audit Plan with 20 of the 48 either completed or in progress. Work continued on commercial contracts with academies and local councils across Shropshire as well as Telford & Wrekin and work would continue to look for opportunities to expand the commercial offering.

Quality Assurance work was undertaken with the Audit, Governance & Procurement Lead Manager undertaking independent monthly checks on audits in order to comply with standards.

During the debate, some Members welcomed the work that had been undertaken and that there had been improvement in respect of reports issued previously. It was asked if there were any trends in relation to workload on audits.

The Principal Auditor explained that workload was stable and with more schools becoming academies this may lead to more business when three yearly contracts were up for renewal.

The report was for noting.

## **AU23      Strategic Risk Register**

The Audit, Governance & Procurement Lead Manager presented an update on the Strategic Risk Register.

As set out in the Terms of Reference, the Audit Committee had the responsibility for overseeing the Council's audit function, governance, financial process and risk management which involved the production of the Corporate Risk Register. Whilst the Risk Register contained details of risks that would affect all levels of the Council, more detailed risks that may affect the delivery of Council priorities were contained within the Strategic Risk Register.

The Strategic Risk Register was last presented to Committee in July and there had been no significant changes, but controls and mitigation actions had been updated. It was regularly kept under review by the Senior Management Team and mitigation measures put in place where there were new or emerging risks as part of the review. There were a considerable number of mitigation actions already in place.

It was considered that the local authority was in a good position in terms of managing corporate strategic risks and it was asked that Members noted the report.

During the debate, some Members commented that the Council had a good reputation and were very well thought of nationally whilst others recognised that the Council had strong structures in place in order to run well and correctly and took governance seriously. There was no magic answer to good governance but sound decision-making and good scrutiny were a good basis. It was asked what formula was used to work out strategic risk. In relation to 'grow your own' schemes to address recruitment challenges, Members were interested to learn what roles were hard to recruit to and where had this approach been used.

The Audit, Governance & Procurement Lead Manager echoed the comments particularly in relation to financial performance and service performance. Whilst there was no formal methodology to strategic level risk, best practice and policies as set out by ALARM, the national body that oversaw public sector risk, set out descriptors to determine risk. A key deciding factor in relation to whether a risk was a strategic or operational risk was the likely impact it would have on service delivery or residents; for example, where a risk would prevent work in one part of the Council versus a risk which would prevent the Council from operating at all.

The Director: Policy & Governance explained that, in relation to recruitment challenges, legal services was one area that had traditionally been difficult to recruit to. One action taken was to offer an opportunity for a career-graded post so that a non-qualified individual would be able to qualify into a solicitor role with a clear pathway setting out milestones to be achieved. Similar approaches had been adopted in the planning and highways teams. The Council also sought to be identified as an employer of choice to help overcome recruitment challenges and part of the work to tackle such matters saw activity to promote working in local government as a career choice.

The Director: Finance, People & IDT explained that the Highways Team had recruited an engineering apprentice which had received over 100 applications with the intention of bringing someone in at a lower level with a view to getting experience across all areas.

The Chair thanked the officers for the positive report and the report was noted.

The meeting ended at 6.46 pm

**Chairman:** .....

**Date:** Wednesday 28 January 2026