

Agenda Item 3

Minute



Draft

Minute of meeting of the Audit Committee held remotely, on Friday 5 March 2021 at 9.45 a.m.

Voting Members: Allyson Black (Vice-Chair)
Gordon Johnston (Chair)

Non – voting Members: Robert Clark, NHS Staff Representative

Also Attending: Patricia Cassidy, Chief Officer
Sara Lacey, Chief Social Work Officer
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager
Grace Scanlin, Ernst and Young (External Audit)
Jillian Thomson, Chief Finance Officer
Isabel Wright, Internal Audit Manager (Acting)

AC18. Apologies

There were no apologies.

AC19. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

AC20. Minute

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 4 December 2020 was approved.

AC21. Strategic Risk Register

The committee considered a report by the Chief Finance Officer which provided an update on the IJB's Strategic Risk Register.

There were 11 live risks recorded in the register of which 8 were currently considered as high risk and 3 as medium risk.

No new risks had been added to the register since it was considered by the Committee on 4 December 2020.



The committee asked what the impact of Covid-19 had been on staff recruitment and retention and what the likely impact would be once 'normality' returned. Ms Cassidy said that this was monitored constantly and where there had been gaps staff had been redeployed successfully – for example into Mental Health Units and Care Homes. A report on staffing would be presented to the Integration Joint Board in March. Sara Lacey added that she had established a short-life working group to look into Social Work recruitment and retention in light of the huge change that had been brought about by the pandemic in how people want to work. It was important that management understood this in order to develop a workforce strategy to support the changed needs of staff. A detailed workforce plan had been requested by the Scottish Government, due in March, and it was expected that this would set out plans for future years which took account of the impacts of Covid-19 across the partnership. Following a question in regard to the resilience of partnerships, for example with the 3rd sector Ms Cassidy advised that as part of the best value audit of Falkirk Council a number of self-assessments would be carried out, including with partner organisations, with a view to an Improvement Plan being submitted to the Integration Joint Board.

It was suggested by the committee that during the pandemic the public had found it difficult to make appointments with their G.P.s and that the systems put in place, such as telephone appointments with G.P.s or nurses had created a 'distance' and barrier between the community and its G.P.s. When asked when the system would return to pre-Covid-19 arrangements where appointments could be made, Ms Cassidy advised that this was a matter which was being considered both locally and nationally. The models which had been brought into place during the pandemic had challenged the longstanding model, but had brought benefits. It was important that the public could access the most appropriate service and this might not necessarily be the G.P. However, Ms Cassidy acknowledged that the public view could be different and it was important to understand this perception of the services provided.

Decision

The committee noted the draft strategic risk register set out in the appendix to the report and noted that it would be reviewed by the Senior Leadership Group in March 2021.

AC22. Internal Audit Progress Report

The committee considered a report by the Internal Audit Manager (Acting) which provided an update on the progress completing the 2020/21 Internal Audit Plan.

The current Internal Audit Plan had contained two reviews – Directions and Risk Management Arrangements. Internal Audit activity had been limited by

the impact of Covid-19. Fieldwork had commenced in February 2021 on the audit of Risk Management arrangements and it was anticipated that the findings would be reported to the committee in June 2021. The Board had not yet approved its policy in regard to Directions and consequently it was proposed that this review would be carried forward into the 2021/22 Audit Plan.

The committee indicated that it made sense to delay the audit of the Directions policy to the following year having been advised by the Chief Finance Officer that the Directions policy would be submitted to the Board shortly.

Decision

The committee noted the progress to date in completing the 2020/21 Internal Audit Plan and agreed to defer the Directions Audit to 2021/22.

AC23. Internal Audit Plan 2021/22

The committee considered a report by the Internal Audit Manager (Acting) presenting the 2021/22 Internal Audit Plan for approval.

Two reviews were proposed – Directions (which had been carried forward from the 2020/21 Plan) and Business Continuity and Resilience:- this would be a review of the impact of Covid 19 on existing business continuity and resilience arrangements, as well as the arrangements for recovery and reconfiguration. It would include a focus on the review and integration of Health and Social Care Partnership resilience planning frameworks.

Reports would be provided to the Audit Committee detailing progress in completing the 2021/22 Internal Audit Plan and highlighting any key findings or emerging themes.

Internal Audit would produce an Annual Assurance Report providing an opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the IJB's control environment. This report would include a summary of work undertaken and a comparison of work completed against work planned.

Following a question Mrs Wright stated that although the Plan featured two audits, she was comfortable that Internal Audit would be able to rely on wider opinion when considering the overall assurance later in the year.

Decision

The committee:-

(1) approved the Internal Audit Plan for 2021/22, and

- (2) noted that progress would be reported to the Audit Committee on an ongoing basis.

AC24. External Audit Plan 2020-21

The committee considered a report by the Chief External Auditor presenting the External Audit Plan 2020-21.

In presenting the report Ms Scanlin explained that Audit Scotland had yet to finalise some of the guidance for Auditors and as such some of the timings had yet to be finalised. This reflected Audit Scotland's view that the impact of the pandemic would last into 2021 and it would not, as had previously been anticipated, be a normal year. In terms of the wider scope of the audit there would be a self-assessment around the best value guidance for Integration Joint Boards and this would tie in with the best value audit of Falkirk Council. It was anticipated that a new audit code would be produced later in the year which would have a greater focus on best value. She added that there would be a reduced focus on public authorities as going concerns.

Ms Cassidy added that she had spoken with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Integration Joint Board both of whom were supportive of undertaking a self-evaluation and self-assessment exercise which would feed into Falkirk Council's Best Value audit. Following a question Ms Scanlin explained the arrangements that would be put in place in recognition of the fact that the audit arrangements for the NHS were not coterminous in Forth Valley.

The committee highlighted that it would be difficult this year to assess best value in light of the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Ms Scanlin concurred, but added that Aberdeen City Council had recently undergone a best value audit and that this had focussed on the actions taken in response to the pandemic and their impact.

Decision

The committee noted the External Audit Plan 2020-21.

AC25. National Audit and Inspection Report Overview

The committee considered a report by the Chief Finance Officer which provided an overview of all national audit, scrutiny, and inspection reports published since the previous Audit Committee meeting held on 4 December 2020.

A total of 7 reports had been published by Audit Scotland and 1 report via the Care Inspectorate.

Decision

The committee noted the report.