

Audit and Governance Committee

**Annual Report
2023/24**

FOREWORD

It is my pleasure to present this annual report of the Audit and Governance Committee for 2023/24 to the Full Council.

This report highlights the work of the Committee over the last year as provided within the Committee's 'Terms of Reference and Scope of Work'. It also includes a brief forward look into the year ahead on the Committee's work and developments.

The Audit and Governance Committee continues to provide a robust and independent challenge to the processes, structures and arrangements surrounding the Council's audit, assurance, risk management, financial control, and governance framework. A particular focus in the coming year will be on the delivery of the Council's Improvement Plan, Transformation Plan, Exit Strategy, and action plan within the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

A key objective has been to restore trust and confidence in the Council's audit, control and corporate governance arrangements, moving from past examples of poor practices to best practices. The Committee therefore focussed its efforts on seeking assurances of the effectiveness of ongoing grip and control, culture, risk management, compliance, and transformation programmes, and the Council's ability to demonstrate value for money and best value.

This year, I changed the structure of my report to be more outcome-focused; moving from the Committee's processes and activities to the assurances received, improvements noted, and impact achieved. The report also includes comments on areas for further improvements across the Council's governance, risk management, internal control and financial reporting frameworks to ensure the successful delivery of Croydon's ambition to its residents.

In no particular order, I would like to thank the officers, external auditors, cabinet members, the Scrutiny committee, professional advisers, the improvement and assurance panel, and members of the Audit and Governance Committee for their input and support of the work of the Committee.

Dr Olu Olasode PhD APSA FCCA
Independent Chair
Audit and Governance Committee

A. INTRODUCTION

1. The Audit and Governance Committee (the Committee) has a wide-ranging brief that underpins the Council's governance processes by providing independent challenge and assurance of the adequacy of risk management, internal control, audit, anti-fraud and the financial reporting framework. It also deals with a limited number of matters not reserved to the Council or delegated to another Committee and related to a non-executive function.
2. The Committee was formed in 2022, replacing the former General Purposes and Audit Committee. The reporting period was the second full year the Committee was in place.
3. This report details the work of the Committee during 2023-24, outlining its role in the work done, progress made, and impact achieved by the Council in the delivery of:
 - Governance and Assurance
 - Budget Monitoring and Financial Control
 - Financial Reporting and External Audit
 - Risk Management
 - Anti-Fraud
 - Internal Audit and Compliance
 - Internal Control
 - Transformation Programme
 - Financial Sustainability and Best Value
 - Exit Strategy
 - Scrutiny, Voice, and Peer Challenge
4. This report also looks forward to 2024-25 and highlights some planned changes and improvements.
5. Members of the Committee have a wide range of skills and bring both technical and professional experience to the role. Table 1, below, provides details of the Committee Members during 2023-24.

Table 1: Members of the Audit and Governance Committee 2023-24

Role	Membership during 2023/24
Independent Chair	Dr Olu Olasode
Vice-Chair	Councillor Matt Griffiths
Member	Councillor Claire Bonham
Member	Councillor Simon Brew
Member	Councillor Sherwan Chowdry (until 17 May 2023)
Member	Sean Fitzsimons (from 17 May 2023)
Member	Councillor Patricia Hay Justice (until 17 May 2023)
Member	Councillor Endri Llabuti
Member	Enid Mollyneaux (from 17 May 2023)
Member	Councillor Nikhil Sherine Thampi
Independent Member	David Clarke (From March 2024)
Reserve Members:	Councillors: Kola Agboola (from 17 May 2023), Alisa Flemming (from 17 May 2023), Sean Fitzsimons (until 17 May 2023), Simon Fox, Mark Johnson, Enid Mollyneaux (until 17 May 2023) and Stella Nabukeera and Helen Redfern (from 17 May 2023).

B. THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE IN 2023-24

6. The Audit and Governance Committee met seven times during the year, during which time it continued to provide a robust and independent challenge to the processes, structures and arrangements surrounding the Council's audit, assurance, risk management, financial control, and governance framework.
7. Significant focus was particularly given to the latter two during the last year, as these particularly impact the Council's underlying financial sustainability, the effectiveness of its governance and assurance arrangements, the Council's ability to deliver services to residents, and the delivery of the Council's Exit Strategy.

8. By the end of the 2023/24 municipal year, the Committee has further strengthened its work through:
 - a. The addition of an independent member as a member of the Committee. The Committee during the year advertised for the vacant post of independent member, and following a shortlisting, commenced interviewing potential candidates in June 2023. Following the approval of the Council, the successful candidate attended his first Committee meeting in March 2024.
 - b. The continued use of an 'action log' and improvement in tracking and escalation arrangements. This helps monitor the implementation of actions arising from each Committee.
 - c. The introduction of an 'Assurance Map'. In September 2023 the Committee completed an assurance mapping exercise. This was to confirm that the Committee was obtaining sufficient information/assurance to satisfy the requirements of all aspects of its terms of reference. The assurance map is now included as a standing item at each Committee meeting to help inform the Committee's forward plan.
 - d. Member development programmes. Additional training was provided to members on the role of the Audit and Governance Committee on 20 July 2023.
 - e. Closer working with the Scrutiny Committee. In addition to periodic meetings between the Independent Chair of the Committee and the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, the Committee has introduced formal joint meetings with the Scrutiny Committee to discuss annual work plans of both committees, areas of current/emerging risks and other focus areas. The Committee also invited the Chair and Vice Chair of Scrutiny to key brainstorming sessions on the Council's risks framework and assurance mapping.

C. GOVERNANCE AND ASSURANCE

9. The Audit and Governance Committee continued to monitor progress made by the Council in delivering its Annual Governance Statement (AGS) Action Plan, with progress reports presented to the Committee regularly. The AGS brings together the Council's various improvement action plans on governance, control and assurance arising from the external auditors' Report in the Public Interest (RIPI) 1, RIPI 2, Croydon Renewal Plan, Governance Review, investigation and other reports.
10. The AGS 2022/23 and its accompanying Action Plan were presented and agreed upon by the Committee at the meeting held on 19 October 2023. An update on the 2022/23 AGS Action Plan was subsequently reported to the Committee at the meeting held on 1 February 2024.

11. At the time of writing the AGS for the year 2023/24 is currently being considered, in draft form, by the Committee.
12. The Committee's oversight included, but was not limited to, seeking assurance and evidence of:
 - Effective risk management of executive decisions on projects.
 - Compliance with legal advice, procedures and the Council's Constitution
 - Working within delegated authority and seeking approvals where needed.
 - Governance of strategic developments, with clear guidance on the roles of the nominated representatives.
13. During the year, the Committee also received a whistleblowing update and approved the Council's governance framework.
14. The Committee assessed that by the end of the 2023/24 municipal year, the Council had:
 - a. Strengthened internal control environment with more use of internal control boards (ICBs).
 - b. Strengthened the process for producing and monitoring the AGS with individual sign-off by chief officers, tracking of action plan and its implementation, triangulation of evidence of implementation and impact, and escalation of non-compliance or long-standing actions.
15. However, the Committee considered that more progress is required in the following areas:
 - a. Additional measures should be taken to address the prevailing culture of non-compliance in future.
 - b. Increasing line of sight to the ICB through quarterly reports of ICB's monitoring to the CMT and six-monthly reports to the Audit and Governance Committee.
 - c. Ensuring that the messages and tone of AGS align with the report of the Head of Internal Audit.

D. BUDGET MONITORING AND FINANCIAL RECOVERY

16. The Committee has continued to build on the understanding and assurance it developed in 2021/22 over the Council's financial governance, with reports being received on:
 - Timely production of budgets.
 - Budget monitoring arrangements and framework for ensuring better visibility and openness.

- Implementation of the Oracle Improvements Programme, presented to the October 2023 meeting, and the Core Business Systems Assurance, presented to the March 2024 meeting.
17. The Committee assessed that by the end of the 2023/24 municipal year, the Council had:
 - a. Improved its arrangements for timely publication and monitoring of budgets monthly.
 - b. The Committee has also recognised significant risks in the delivery of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.
 - c. It has been, particularly, noted that most of these assurances derive from the successful delivery of the Council's Transformation Programme and effective implementation of the Oracle Improvement Programme.
 18. Whilst there are early signs of an improvement in the Council's culture of compliance and financial discipline, the Committee observed that further work is needed to:
 - a. Strengthen the culture of financial grip and control to ensure sustained financial recovery.
 - b. Provide further assurance on the actions to address the MTFS risks.
 - c. Provide further assurance on the successful delivery of the Council's Transformation Programme and the Oracle Improvement Programme.

E. FINANCIAL REPORTING AND EXTERNAL AUDIT

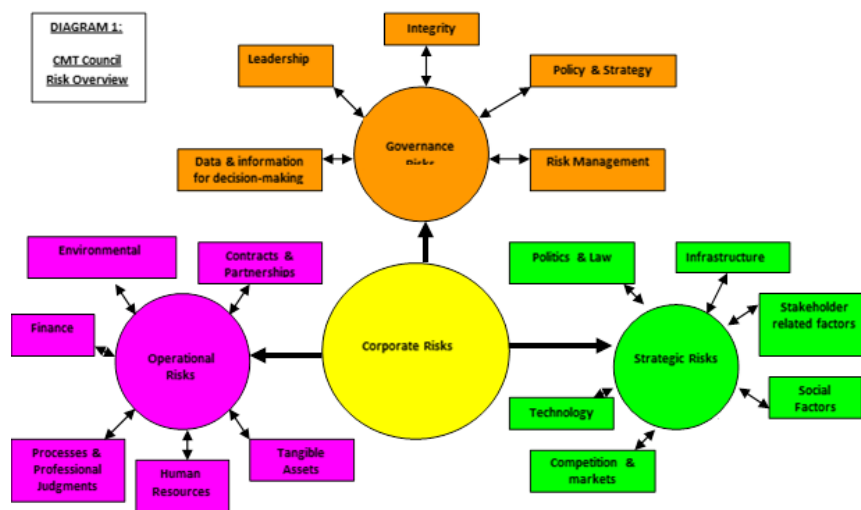
19. The Committee was pleased to note the successful resolution in the accounting treatment for Croydon Affordable Homes/Croydon Affordable Tenures and subsequently approved the amended draft Financial Accounts for 2019/20 at its meeting on 20 July 2023. Following the completion of External Audit work, the final Financial Accounts 2019/20 were subsequently presented at the 14 March 2024 meeting.
20. The 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 Accounts were not completed due to the delays with the 2019/20 Audit, which resulted in the statutory deadlines for the completion of these reports being missed. The Committee is now monitoring the agreed timetable for the delivery and audits of the 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 accounts.
21. The Council's external audit service is provided by Grant Thornton (GT) under a contract let on Croydon's behalf by Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA). GT works in partnership with the Council ensuring its governance processes are effective and are invited to all of the Committee meetings.
22. During the 2023/24 a number of External Audit reports were presented to the Committee, as follows:

- S24 Statutory Recommendations, presented on 20 April 2023. GT concluded that they had a duty to report on the historically inadequate arrangements and capacity at the Council, most particularly in relation to the financial years 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22, to prepare reliable financial statements and supporting working papers and concerns regarding the Council's financial sustainability and historic levels of reserves.
 - Interim Auditors Report for 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22, presented on 20 April 2023. Although the external audit of the accounts for these years was delayed, Grant Thornton is obliged under the National Audit Office Code of Practice to report concerns promptly rather than waiting until the audit work is complete. This report fulfilled that requirement and reported five recommendations.
 - Interim Audit Findings Report for 2019/20, presented on 30 November 2023. They reported on the conclusion of the External Audit Value for Money work and provided an adverse conclusion.
 - The External Audit Findings Report for 2019/20, presented in March 2024. This provided a disclaimer opinion, which was explained as being due to the ongoing police investigations, following the RIPI2 and Kroll reports, and the unknown outcomes of these investigations.
23. The Government has been consulting on the introduction of a backstop for local authority accounts, to bring local authority accounts and auditing up to date. This proposes a framework to ensure that all existing accounts are signed off by 30 September 2024, revised to December, with auditors disclaiming, qualifying or signing off all previous sets of accounts by this date.
24. As noted in the paragraph above, it is unlikely that the 2021/22 and 2022/23 will be finalised by 30 September 2024. The Council has made a special request to the National Audit Office to be exempt from the backstop.
25. The National Elections held on 4 July 2024 paused the introduction of the backstop but led to some changes being introduced to the arrangements and deadline by the new government.
26. At the time of writing, the Committee is assured that:
- a. The Council has the capacity and capabilities to ensure that its financial statements, accounts and audits are up to date within the short to medium term. These are, however subject to the resolutions around the backstop proposals and possible exemption of the Council by the government.
 - b. The Committee will continue to monitor this and, where possible, provide support to help ensure that all accounts are fully audited. It will also continue to work with Officers and the External Auditor to progress the outstanding audits as a priority.

27. The Committee will be seeking assurance on the implications of the proposed legislation on Croydon Council's ability to present its audited financial statements to residents.

F. RISK MANAGEMENT

28. The Committee was pleased to note steady improvements during the year in the Council's arrangements for Risk Management and Anti-Fraud. The Council has a formal risk management framework that is modelled on good practice activities operated within local authorities and other public sector organisations. This framework sets out the requirements and responsibilities for the management of risk including at the most senior levels of the organisation and includes activities such as a formal quarterly review and reporting process for the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Divisional Management Teams (DMTs).
29. The Framework seeks to ensure that the Council's key strategic risks are identified, recorded and reviewed continuously to ensure integration between the risk management framework and the strategic, financial and performance management frameworks using the reporting framework detailed in the diagram below.



30. The Committee, periodically, receives a report on either corporate-rated 'red' risks or a 'deep dive' on a specific identified 'high-rated' risk. Committee members by reviewing the current 'high-rated' risks and conducting 'in-depth' reviews of risks have sought to scrutinise and receive assurance on the application of the risk management framework in the organisation.
31. As an example, a risk register deep dive was conducted by the Committee into Parking Services income targets at the February 2024 meeting.

32. The Committee was pleased to note ongoing work by the Council to strengthen corporate risk management. This includes:
 - a. 'Take a step back risk workshops' externally facilitated for each Corporate Director and their management teams to improve capabilities and strengthen ownership.
 - b. Externally facilitated risk workshops for elected Members to enhance capacity, understanding, and leadership.
 - c. Requirement for every corporate risk owner, Director and Corporate Director to formally review and sign off their risks via the JCAD corporate risk system quarterly, with a formal audit trail to assure compliance reported back to the Committee.
 - d. An upgrade of the JCAD risk system and refresh training for all risk owners
 - e. The continuing development of the departmental risk champions network to assist risk owners with the embedding of the council's risk management framework.
33. To strengthen the Council's risk management framework:
 - a. The Committee will continue to seek assurances on the Council's arrangements to improve risk identification, risk management and risk reporting.
 - b. The Committee will sharpen its focus on the key risks that impact on delivery of the Council's strategy.
 - c. The Committee has requested a restructure of the Strategic Risk Register to align with the Corporate Improvement Plan, the Council's Transformation Plan, and the Council's Exit Strategy, and for clear triangulation with the Corporate Management Team and Directorate Agendas.
 - d. The Committee will continue to monitor developments on the revised risk management arrangements and seek assurances on the impact of the initiatives.

G.ANTI-FRAUD

34. As part of the Committee's role of overseeing the antifraud and corruption strategy, the Committee receives periodic updates on the work of the team.
35. During the year the Committee received regular updates on the counter-fraud work undertaken by the Counter Fraud Shared Service and noted the continued good results concerning proactive fraud identification and reactive investigation work, namely that between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 the Anti-Fraud team had identified in total £3M savings comprising outcomes from 250 cases closed during the period.

36. In addition, work on the Cabinet Office National Fraud Initiative Data sets generated additional cashable outcomes of £750,194 with a further notional estimated savings (for example recovered tenancies) of £1,488,747 with some further results still possible. In addition, development by the Council of the NFI Fraud Hub has generated very good preventative results for services such as pensions and blue badges (travel team).
37. Furthermore, the Council has continued with its plan to improve counter-fraud awareness across the Council and to strengthen working with our partners. This has included:
- Assisting neighbouring boroughs by providing expertise in the form of staff resources where they have gaps in expertise and generating income for Croydon Council.
 - Maintaining a learning and development programme, including face-to-face and e-learning opportunities.
 - Maintaining fraud reporting facilities, including a fraud hotline and dedicated email reporting facility.
 - The employment for the first time of a dedicated Fraud Prevention Officer
38. As a result of this work, the Committee was assured in the following areas:
- a. Improved levels of awareness of fraud have been achieved generally across the organisation over recent years. This has been evidenced by the level of referrals to the Counter Fraud Shared Service.
 - b. A number of proactive initiatives were delivered during the year, including the routine vetting of all new housing succession and Right to Buy applications which have had very good results for the housing function.
 - c. Successful introduction of a new case management system to reduce costs, and improve functionality, reliability and reporting for the Council.
 - d. The risk of serious fraud in the Council is effectively managed.

H. INTERNAL AUDIT AND COMPLIANCE

39. As part of its role, the Committee reviewed and approved the Audit Charter, Audit Strategy and the Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25 on 14 March 2023.
40. During the year, the Committee received several reports from Internal Audit on progress against the plan and high-risk issues identified. This included the Head of Internal Audit's Annual Report for 2022/23 which provided an overall annual opinion of 'Limited Assurance' and drew attention to those specific areas of weakness that were carried forward into the Annual Governance Statement. This is the 3rd successive year

that a limited assurance has been provided and some of the specific areas of weakness have been recurring across all three years.

41. Internal Audit activity reports received by the Committee continued to identify areas where control environment improvement had been identified through audits.
42. Although there has been some improvement in the results of formal audits completed so far and the work across the organisation since the Reports in the Public Interest were issued by the External Auditor, other indicators are suggesting that internal control still has some way to go to be properly embedded and it is anticipated that the assurance in this year's Head of Internal Audit's Report will again be limited.
43. A key measure of the Internal Audit service's effectiveness is the implementation of agreed actions to address the issues identified in audits. The target for implementation of actions is 80% for priority 2 and 3 actions and 90% for priority 1 actions. The stringent approach to the follow-up process has continued with tight timescales for follow-up work linked to the level of assurance.
44. The Committee has continued to emphasise the importance of implementing Internal Audit's recommendations and has supported Internal Audit in its work to ensure control weaknesses are effectively dealt with. The Committee has received regular updates on the status of outstanding recommendations, and where appropriate has requested further information.
45. The Internal Audit progress report to the Committee in November 2023 noted, in particular, better progress in clearing historic follow-ups, with only one remaining in 2018/19 and three remaining in 2019/20. This, however, remains an area of concern for the Committee, which will continue to monitor and, where appropriate, call in Officers to ensure that risk exposure is minimised.
46. The table below provides details of the performance in this area in all follow-up work completed since 1 April 2017 (up to 31 October 2023).

Table 1: Implementation of Agreed Actions to date

	Target	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Percentage of priority one agreed actions implemented at the time of the follow up audit	90%	100%	99%	74%	70%	50%
Percentage of all agreed actions implemented at the time of the follow up audit	80%	80%	93%	84%	89%	71%

47. With regards to other areas of compliance, the Committee continued its oversight of the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) Deficit Management Plan, with update reports being presented to both the 21 September 2023 and the 1 February 2024 meetings, where it was demonstrated that the Council was performing well in meeting its agreed targets.

48. The Committee also received the annual Treasury Management Report, which reviewed the Council's Treasury Management activities for the year 2022/23, including:
- Compliance with the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy as agreed by the full Council.
 - Treasury borrowing and investment activity for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.
 - Compliance with agreed Treasury and Prudential Indicators and the CIPFA 2017 Prudential Code for Capital Finance.
49. By the end of the reporting year, the Committee was noted and received assurances on:
- a. Improvement in the Council's response to internal audit recommendations and proposed actions.
 - b. Ongoing work to strengthen the control environment and improve the opinion of the Head of Internal Audit.
 - c. Planned work to strengthen the process of tracking and monitoring actions.
50. However, the Committee noted that:
- a. Further work is needed to strengthen ownership and engagement with audits, and the implementation of improvement actions and recommendations.
 - b. In this regard, the Committee has noted the need to strengthen the role of the Finance and Risk Internal Control Board (ICB) in monitoring compliance and implementation of actions with escalation to the Corporate Management Team (CMT), where necessary.
51. The Committee will continue to monitor the planned improvements and, where necessary, assess effectiveness by inviting chief officers, with their respective cabinet members, to provide assurances to the Committee.

I. INTERNAL CONTROL

52. A pivotal role of the Committee is its work in developing the Council's internal control and assurance processes culminating in the Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require the Council to review the effectiveness of its systems of internal control and publish the AGS each year alongside the financial statements.
53. The information for the AGS is generated through a number of the Council's Assurance frameworks described earlier, including:
- Risk Management

- Internal Audit
 - Anti-Fraud, and
 - External Audit
54. The Committee leads this review by receiving regular reports on these service areas.
55. To support its understanding of issues relating to internal control and to emphasise its commitment to a robust internal control environment, the Committee invites officers to attend its meetings to give briefings about strategic risks and what is being done to mitigate these. It also invites officers to give explanations where significant issues are identified through internal audits.
56. The Committee's view at the end of the reporting year was that:
- a. There was an overall improvement in the overall control environment within the Council, with a clear understanding and ownership of the need to deliver 'Best Value' by officers.
 - b. There is, however, also recognition of the need for more visibility on the work of the Internal Control Boards, with clearer links to strategic reports presented by officers.
57. The Committee will continue to monitor improvements in these areas.

J. TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

58. The Committee welcomed the Council's programme to save about £100m in four years by becoming the most cost-efficient and effective council in London.
59. In September 2023 the Committee was updated on the development of the People & Cultural Transformation Strategy. The presentation provided covered the Council's journey up to then in making workforce culture change and the development of the strategy and actions over the next three years to ensure improved services are provided to residents. It was also explained that a Transformation Board had been established in 2022 to oversee service delivery work programmes and that the newly recruited Director of Transformation was working closely with the Chief People Officer.
60. As the Council's Transformation Programme was in the design phase during the reporting period:
- a. The Committee received assurance on the structure and governance arrangements of the programme.
 - b. The Committee will be requesting further updates during 2024/25 and will continue to monitor the Council's transformation journey.
 - c. The Committee will also be seeking assurances and testing the evidence on the robustness, pace and resilience of the

Programme, particularly, the management of the risks associated with embedding and sustaining the changes.

61. The Independent Chair of the Committee has included these in his regular update meetings with chief officers to ensure:
- a. Effective governance of the programme and integration of the various work streams.
 - b. Robust programme and change management.
 - c. Successful alignment and management of associated risks.
 - d. AGC's line of sight to the Transformation Board.

K. EXIT STRATEGY

62. The Committee noted the Improvement and Intervention Panel's 'Intervention Exit Strategy' (IAP Exit Strategy) that was issued in October 2023. This IAP Exit Strategy describes the tangible improvements they expect the Council to make by March 2025. These are grouped under the following headings:
- Governance
 - Culture and Leadership
 - Financial stability
 - Service performance
 - Capacity and Capability to improve
63. The IAP Exit Strategy also provides a framework against which the IAP can report the Council's progress.
64. In presenting the report of the 'Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 and Action Plan' to the Committee at its 19 October 2023 meeting, The Committee was advised by Officers that work to identify overlaps between AGS Action Plan and IAP Exit Strategy would be undertaken and confirmed that IAP Exit Strategy Actions would be included in future AGS Action Plan update reports.
65. The Committee further received assurance at the meeting held on 1 February 2024 that the Annual Governance Statement (Update on Action Plan 2022/23) and Exit Strategy Action Plan Tracker had been developed and that the Committee would receive reporting on the recommendations when targets were met.
66. The Independent Chairman of the Committee has reviewed an early draft of the 2023/2024 AGS which included the Exit Strategy actions and will be presented to the Committee for discussion, challenge and assurance. The Chair of the Committee also discusses the actions, risks and assurances in his catch-up meetings with IAP, respective Cabinet Members, and Officers.

67. The Committee is expecting further updates during 2024/25 as actions are implemented and will continue to monitor the progress of these and challenge where appropriate.

L. SCRUTINY, VOICE, AND PEER CHALLENGE

68. As described earlier, the Committee has worked to strengthen its relationships and working relationships within the Council, for instance with the Ethics and the Scrutiny Committees, where the Chairs of this Committee and the Ethics and the Scrutiny Committees have attended meetings of each other's Committee and been liaising during the year.
69. The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also attended the Audit and Governance Committee on 20 July 2023, where she provided an update on the work of Scrutiny.
70. In addition to periodic meetings between the Independent Chair of the Committee and the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, the Committee has introduced formal joint meetings with the Scrutiny Committee to discuss annual work plans of both committees, areas of current/emerging risks and other focus areas.
71. The Committee also invited the Chair and Vice Chair of Scrutiny to key brainstorming sessions on the Council's risks framework and assurance mapping.
72. The Independent Chair of the Committee was also invited to observe the Scrutiny Committee meetings and has agreed on a process for escalation or referral of matters that we require further assurances on governance to the AGC.
73. In particular, the AGC seeks assurance on the effectiveness of the scrutiny function of the council and the process for ensuring that the voice of Croydon's residents is considered as part of the Council's decision-making.
74. Finally, the Committee is aware that the Council will be undergoing a Corporate Peer Challenge organised by the Local Government Association (LGA). This is part of the Council's effort to ensure that it delivers Productivity, Financial Sustainability, and Best Value. According to the LGA, the Corporate Peer Challenge provides robust, strategic and credible challenge and support to councils, bringing together political and managerial leadership, through the use of member and officer peers.
75. The Committee will monitor and support the process and will receive a report on the outcome.

M. LOOKING AHEAD

76. The Audit and Governance Committee will continue to assess, challenge, test and provide independent assurance on the robustness of the arrangements surrounding the Council's financial management, internal control, governance, and the delivery of the Council's recovery plans.
77. The Committee will introduce further arrangements to tackle non-compliance, including escalation to CMT and the Cabinet, and invitation of officers to the Committee for deep dives.
78. The Committee will continue to work closely with the Council's Improvement and Assurance Panel and provide its view on assurances received on the delivery of the Exit Strategy, risk management, governance, transformation and financial recovery.
79. As noted above, the Committee will closely monitor the changes to the risk management framework that put a clearer focus on the management of risks relating to the delivery of the corporate plan and Exit Strategy.
80. Further member training will be scheduled, including sessions on financial reporting, assurance mapping, and risk management.
81. The Committee will consider the quality review of the Internal Audit function to be conducted during 2024/25, which will include the 5 yearly External Quality Assurance (EQA) check required by the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS).
82. The Committee will continue to look externally to assess productivity and use benchmarking, peer reviews, and best practices to improve its effectiveness.
83. Finally, the Committee will seek assurance on arrangements to ensure that the Council delivers its best value duties.