

Appendix – Scrutiny & Audit Recommendation Status Summary January 24

Grant Thornton Key Recommendation 7 (2021): Members in key statutory roles, in particular in relation to Cabinet, scrutiny, standards and audit, need to be provided with effective development training and support. The Member Development Programme should be reviewed to ensure corporate governance forms part of the training for members with governance roles	
External Follow-up Reviews 2022 Findings	<p>Grant Thornton acknowledged the progress of the Member Development Programme and noted that it has been augmented with additional training sessions delivered by the LGA (Local Government Association) focusing on the Member and Officer Relationships, and in delivering a development programme for Cabinet.</p> <p>In their follow-up review, Grant Thornton made a further recommendation in relation to the Member Development Programme as a whole but did not make any points around learning and development in relation to scrutiny specifically, as they acknowledged the improvements made.</p> <p>The recommendation made by Grant Thornton relating to the MDP (Member Development Programme) was: Improvement Rec 19 (2022): The Council needs to build on the progress being made on member development and conclude the 2022/23 programme including the review of member PDPs and take further steps to finalise arrangements on succession planning for members in SRA roles.</p> <p>The LGA commented on the council's commitment to review the member development programme at regular intervals and set out that it is important to ensure that the pace of delivery is made to feel sustainable. The LGA follow-up review acknowledged that the improvements to scrutiny have been supplemented with a range of training and additional training sessions on member and officer relations is due to be facilitated by the LGA on 27 February 2024.</p>
Summary of activity and next steps	<p>The current MDP has been updated to reflect the review of Member PDPs and updated arrangements for new Member Induction following the number of new Members elected in May. A new Member survey is being conducted, however, there has been a low return rate as yet. Members have been completing analysis after each training session. Further analysis of these will be undertaken and this, along with findings from face-to-face Member sessions on the Member-Officer relationship and engagement with LGA will be used to inform the review of MDP and inform new Member induction for 2024-2025.</p>

	<p>Scrutiny Members' and ARAC Committee Members' learning needs remain under review by the Chairs together with supporting Officers. Scrutiny Chairs are also receiving coaching and mentoring training from external providers. A learning and development plan for audit members is currently being drafted to ensure that key skills needed for the role is clear. This is linked in with CIPFA's 'Audit committees: practical guidance for local authorities and the police' guidance.</p> <p>Further training with external providers is being explored including with neighbouring authorities to ensure shared learning and the opportunity to engage with peers to discuss new ways of working.</p>
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Grant Thornton Improvement Recommendation I4 (2021): Officer and Member Relationships – the forward plan of the Cabinet should be shared with the Audit Committee and Scrutiny Board to help structure their agenda planning	
External Follow-up Reviews 2022 Findings	<p>Grant Thornton acknowledged that the 'forward plan of Cabinet business has been made available to all members to improve awareness and transparency.</p>
Summary of activity and next steps	<p>The forward plan is shared with all scrutiny boards (in so far as it relates to that respective scrutiny board) to help identify areas for pre-decision scrutiny activity and to ARAC at every meeting to assist with the Committee's work planning. This will continue.</p>

Grant Thornton Improvement Recommendation 12 (2021): Officer and Member Relationships – There is a need to ensure that members of scrutiny and audit committees are aware of their governance roles including how to interrogate reports and ask the right questions	
External Follow-up Reviews 2022 Findings	<p>Positive feedback was received about scrutiny and audit in the follow up reviews.</p> <p>In their follow up review Autumn 2022, Grant Thornton set out that 'There is a more mature engagement between the Leader, Cabinet, Committee Chairs and senior officers, supporting good planning and work</p>

	<p>programming across the different committees across different Council committees and a greater level of professionalism in how business is conducted by these committees.’... and ‘Overall, positive progress has been made to improve the culture and professionalism of key Council committees, with the scrutiny function making particular progress.’</p> <p>The LGA commented that ‘it is clear from the people we spoke to that this key strand of the council’s governance arrangements [scrutiny] is going from strength to strength’. And commented on scrutiny’s ‘renewed sense of energy and drive’.</p> <p>Grant Thornton did not make any further recommendations around the role of scrutiny or audit.</p>
<p>Summary of activity and next steps</p>	<p>Ongoing activity is in place to ensure that scrutiny and audit continue to make an effective contribution to the Council’s governance arrangements.</p> <p>This includes the regular meetings to develop and nurture strong, healthy working relationships with members and officers. Chairs of scrutiny boards have regular agenda setting meetings with Directors and officers to ensure that the content of reports enables a rich discussion and debate at Scrutiny and not just information sharing. Scrutiny Board chairs collectively are meeting regularly, whether it is a pre-meeting or prior to Cabinet to agree lines of questioning in advance as well monitoring performance of Boards, attendance, engagement, etc. Audit are having pre meetings and work is ongoing to ensure shared learning and cross cutting areas are discussed at regular meetings between the overarching Chair of Scrutiny and the Audit Chair as well as regular meetings with the Chair of Audit and the Section 151 Officer.</p> <p>Job roles, scrutiny protocols and a framework have been developed and embedded to guide the way scrutiny is conducted, details how Cabinet members and officers interact with scrutiny and also helps to support and drive a change in culture and mindset of both members and officers to ensure that Sandwell has an effective overview and scrutiny function.</p> <p>A learning and development plan for audit members is currently being drafted to ensure that key skills needed for the role is clear and members of ARAC can work towards the skills identified as part of their PDP.</p>

	These arrangements will continue over Municipal Year 2024-2025.
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Grant Thornton Improvement Recommendation 34 (2022): Audit Committee – now that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee has agreed the action to bring this long-standing matter to resolution [review into the Cox and Wragge Report], it will be important that – as the Audit and Governance Panel recognised – the Council manages its position so that the matter does not resurface, so that it can move on and focus on its corporate objectives	
External Follow-up Reviews 2022 Findings	<p>In their follow up review, Grant Thornton outlined that: ‘The Audit Committee has continued to operate throughout the year in a manner focussing on significant governance matters’ and that ‘Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council’s arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks’. Grant Thornton noted that the Council Leader is due to confirm the Executive’s position on any further review and made an additional improvement recommendation as follows:</p> <p>Grant Thornton Improvement Recommendation 22 (2022): A final decision on the Cox report needs to be made by the Leader before this matter can be considered formally closed.</p>
Summary of activity and next steps	<p>A report was received by ARAC on 5 June which set out the Executive’s position and the matter has been concluded. The ARAC minutes were reported to Council in July 2023.</p>