

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER/STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, CAMBS, PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 18 March 2026.

PRESENT: Councillor M J Burke – Chair.

Councillors J A Gray, P J Hodgson-Jones, A R Jennings, D J Shaw, I P Taylor and P Webb – Independent Member.

APOLOGIES: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor B S Chapman.

51 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 January 2026 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

52 Members' Interests

No declarations were received.

53 Emergency Planning - Compliance Report

A report by the Community Resilience Manager was submitted (a copy of which is appended to the Minute Book) providing an update on the revised Emergency Planning operating model, detailing service delivery improvements and clarifying the Council's statutory duties and expectations as a Category 1 responder, in accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act.

The Community Resilience Manager introduced the report, making particular reference to the response to the Major Incident at Huntingdon Train Station in November 2025, which had been effective and had been highlighted at the Local Resilience Forum at County and National level, which the Committee commended.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Community Resilience Manager advised that Bronze operational training had taken place for 20 officers in late 2025, with further training scheduled in 2026. Having more officers trained would help bring extra resilience and prevent burnout as more rotation of officers could take place and ensure Council business was not affected. Furthermore, there had been a turnover of I-Grade Managers in the position of on-call Silver Command which needed to be replaced, so training was continuous.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Committee commented on and noted the current position as set out in the report.

At 7:13pm, Councillor Gray took his seat in the meeting.

54 Corporate Risk Register

A report by the Interim Corporate Director (Finance and Resources) was submitted (a copy of which is appended to the Minute Book) providing an update on the Corporate Risk Register and presenting a heat map relating to the current residual risk scores and a summary report. It provided the Committee with the opportunity to comment on and offer challenge to the Corporate Leadership Team as part of the active management of risks.

The Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer introduced the report, noting that a Risk Manager had been appointed since the Committee's previous meeting, who would be joining in April 2026.

In response to questions from Committee regarding Risks 20-24, the Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer advised that she believed these were new HR risks picked up from the comments at the Committee's previous meeting, but she would double check and respond to the Committee.

The Committee raised concerns regarding the number of staff yet to undertake mandatory Safeguarding training. There was a short period of time before the deadline for the training to be completed, and the Committee requested to receive the latest position of the figures as a matter of urgency, what steps could be taken to ensure all staff were trained and what sanctions were at HR's disposal to ensure the training was undertaken. The Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer advised that there had been communication within the organisation regarding this matter and Managers were taking necessary steps to ensure their Teams were completing the training, however she would undertake to raise the concerns with management and HR, and a response would be circulated to the Committee.

Regarding staffing, the Committee asked whether the residual risk would have reduced from the high level it was at previously, and if that risk could be diminished because the Council was now a more attractive place to work. The Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer advised that she would take that question away. The Risk Register was reviewed by the Corporate Leadership Team and she would provide that comment to them and give that consideration in the production of the report to the next Committee meeting.

In response to a question from the Committee regarding the recent internet outage, the Chief Digital Information Officer advised that Officers undertook lessons learnt with any incidents. One of the activities that had been undertaken since the recent internet outage was to better understand and enhance the Business Continuity Planning Arrangements.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Committee commented on the reports in the appendices and progress with risk management and noted the risks to the organisation and whether they are being managed in line with the Risk Management StrategyRisk Management Strategy.

55 Internal Audit Progress Report

A report by the Audit Manager, RSM was submitted (a copy of which is appended to the Minute Book) providing an update of the work of the Internal Audit Service since the last meeting and progress against the Internal Audit Plan 2025/26 that was approved by the Committee on 25th March 2025.

The Audit Manager, Dan Harris of RSM introduced the report and invited questions from the Committee.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer advised that she would work with RSM to see when a summary report for the final stage of the Market Towns Programme could be made available, and provide a response to the Committee.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Audit Manager advised that the following agenda item, Minute No.56 set out that there were 3 full follow-up reviews of Capital Expenditure, Creditor Payments and General Ledger proposed as part of the Internal Audit Plan 2026/27.

The Audit Manager advised that a Procurement review was undertaken midway through the financial year, where a partial assurance opinion was reported, and which was subject to a follow up report which would be received at the next Committee meeting. There was an allocation for follow-up coverage in 2026/27 if it was found in the current review that not enough action had been taken. Alternatively, the Committee could suggest a deep-dive review for officers, and although this was not independent assurance, a combination of these options might provide the requisite assurance. Furthermore, the Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer advised that the Code of Procurement document had had significant review, and pro-active work had taken place with the Procurement Manager and Legal Partners. The Audits were welcome and a useful strategic tool to assist driving improvement. The Committee were of the opinion that given the substantial changes that had taken place regarding Procurement Legislation, it was important that the succeeding Committee should discuss which approach it would like to take in order to gain the expected assurance.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Committee commented on and noted the update on work undertaken by Internal Audit to date.

56 Draft Internal Audit Plan for 2026/27 and Internal Audit Charter

A report by the Audit Manager, RSM was submitted (a copy of which is appended to the Minute Book) setting out the Internal Audit Plan for 2026/27

which had been prepared by RSM, following discussions with Corporate Leadership Team, with reference to the Corporate Risks and the professional judgement of the partner from RSM acting in the capacity of Head of Internal Audit.

The Audit Manager, Dan Harris of RSM introduced the report and in light of some of the comments made during the previous item, advised that Mandatory Training was in the scheduled programme for 2026/27, as well as a Safeguarding Audit and a Business Continuity Planning Review. The Committee noted that the plan remained flexible and if there were risks that materialised during the year and RSM needed to flex the coverage, that would take place. Regular meetings took place with officers, and RSM reported into CLT on a monthly basis.

The Committee commended that its feedback had been taken into account, such as reports now planned for Planning, Parking and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) that had been picked up since the previous meeting.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Head of Finance advised that when she had taken up her role, the General Ledger Plan had a deadline of January 2026, but as her priority was preparing the Budget over the period November-January, the deadline was extended to February 2027. She would shortly undertake a full review of all financial, governance and approvals for both Capital and Treasury. There were a number of actions within the General Ledger, and work would start very shortly and continue throughout the year to tick off many of them a lot earlier than February 2027. The plan was that they would all be in place and assurance able to be given by the time the next Budget setting process takes place in February 2027.

RESOLVED

that the Committee noted, commented on and accepted the draft Internal Audit Plan for 2026/27.

57 Internal Audit Actions Update

A report by the Interim Corporate Director (Finance and Resources) was submitted (a copy of which is appended to the Minute Book) setting out the current position with respect to implementation of actions arising from Internal Audit reports.

The Head of Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer introduced the report and invited questions from the Committee.

The Executive Councillor for Governance and Democratic Services commented that Governance was in a much better place than it had been previously. Working with RSM had helped ensure compliance with all Internal Audit standards, and there had been a lot more reporting than had been done previously and she commended the progress made.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Committee commented on and noted the current position regarding actions arising from internal audit reports.

58 Members ICT

A report by the Chief Digital Information Officer was submitted (a copy of which is appended to the Minute Book) providing an update regarding Members' ICT provision post-elections 2026.

The Chief Digital Information Officer introduced the report.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Chief Digital Information Officer advised that all of the ICT options set out could be provisioned, subject to final checks. The options had been presented as a result of feedback from Members regarding frustrations and constraints over the course of the Council's term, as well as improvements in cyber security and capability to ensure Members could access the services requested. When the next Members were elected, they would be able to choose an ICT option which would best suit their needs, and the necessary training would be provided, so the options were an enhancement on the current service. In terms of the budget for the provision, the budget bids put forward were accepted as part of the approved budget agreed by Council. Furthermore, he advised that he did not feel LGR posed a risk to the provision being available to Members. The provisions were a solution that would provide good quality and resilient IT services for Members in an enhanced way compared with what was currently available.

The Committee welcomed the potential improvements as a positive step that would bring benefit to Members in the next term.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

the Committee noted and provided feedback on the proposal in the report.

59 Future Arrangements for Internal Audit

A report by the Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer was submitted (a copy of which is appended to the Minute Book) setting out the intended future arrangements for the provision of Internal Audit services. In line with the Committee's terms of reference, the report sought the Committee's comments.

The Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer introduced the report and invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee commended the work of RSM, who had helped give it more assurance since they undertook the Council's Internal Audit function, however it raised a question over the procurement process that had been followed. Members discussed the respective merits of a direct award compared with market testing and the need to achieve value for money.

In response to the comments raised, the Chief Digital Information Officer advised that the options in regard to the procurement of an Internal Audit Partner were considered in full by the Corporate Leadership Team, as well as the procurement routes available, and it was felt that the YPO Managing Consultancy and Professional Services Framework Agreement provided a level of assurance and protection that ensured the Council remained compliant with Procurement legislation. There was value in the continuation of an Internal Audit function who was experienced and understood the organisation, and it was felt having a period of induction for a different provider would provide a greater risk. Whilst he agreed that under normal circumstances a competitive tender process would be attractive, it was felt that the grounds for a direct award with those assurances from the Framework was the safest and best route to ensure a continued Internal Audit function was in place. The Democratic Services Manager and Monitoring Officer advised that in line with the Council's process, this decision had been taken via a procurement board and specialist advice had been taken in order to ensure the Council was compliant with procurement legislation. Officers had looked at providing value for money and the risks associated with a change of provider had been considered. On balance, it was considered that continuing with RSM posed the lowest risk to the Council in order to meet governance requirements.

Concerns also were raised regarding the timing of the report in light of the terms of the existing contract with RSM. Though RSM would have been well placed to win a contract on points, it was felt that this should have been tested through a process where the market and best value for money could be tested. The Chief Digital Information Officer advised that the discussion on the arrangements was held by the Corporate Leadership Team on 26th January.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer advised that within its terms of reference the Committee could provide comment, and the delegation with respect of the appointment sat with the Corporate Director - Finance & Resources. The Committee expressed its disappointment around the process. While it was able to express an opinion and make a recommendation it was not able to influence the decision. In the circumstances, Members felt that the Chair should have been consulted and involved in the discussions.

In response to a question from the Committee regarding if the direct award required a mandatory standstill period, the Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer advised that she would take the question away and provide a written response.

The Chair expressed his frustration that there was little the Committee could do other than note the recommendation, given the short time before the contract with RSM came to an end, and that he had not been privy to the discussions. He requested that the comments from the Committee be fed back to Officers.

The Executive Councillor for Governance and Democratic Services noted the comments of the Committee around the process undertaken and reiterated the advice that guidance had been sought. She advised that would speak with Officers outside of the meeting reflecting on the comments made by the Committee.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Committee noted and commented on the future arrangements for Internal Audit as outlined in the report.

60 Corporate Governance Committee Progress Report

The Committee received and noted a report (a copy of which is appended to the Minute Book) on progress of actions in response to any decisions taken at previous meetings.

The Democratic Services Officer advised that based on earlier comments from the Committee around the questions and further information requested regarding the uptake of Safeguarding training, this Action would not be removed from the next Progress Report and any responses from Officers would be included in the report for the next meeting.

The Committee were of the opinion that the previous agenda item, Minute No. 59 highlighted that further work was required by the Constitution Review Working Group.

61 Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED

that

the public and press be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.

62 3C ICT Year One Audit

An exempt report by the Chief Digital Information Officer was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Annex to the Minute Book).

RESOLVED

that the Committee acknowledged the report and its contents.

Chair

