

Public Questions and Statements – Audit & Standards Committee

Meeting Date: 6 December 2024

Questions (Committee Remit) NO QUESTIONS RECEIVED RELATED TO THE COMMITTEE REMIT

From: N/A

Question: N/A

Response: N/A

Questions (Published Agenda) NO QUESTIONS RECEIVED RELATED TO AGENDA ITEMS

From: N/A

Question: N/A

Response: N/A

Statements (Committee Remit) NO STATEMENTS RECEIVED RELATED TO THE COMMITTEE REMIT

From: N/A

Statement: N/A

Statements (Published Agenda)

From: Ruth Hubbard

Statement 1: The AGS: overall

The AGS provides an inadequate council account of “how well it has delivered on governance over the course of the previous year, using the seven principles of the framework to guide the evaluation”, and provides little/no meaningful narrative: “the most important way to make the statement meaningful is to ensure that it is an open and honest reflection of the body's governance and its current challenges.” (CiPFA, 2022)

No actual thinking/use is made of the principles beyond bland, unevidenced assurances of compliance. 'Governance' is considered only as a closed, overly technocratic and procedural system - when governance is not only 'internal controls'. The resulting issues and action plan reflect this unjustifiably narrow approach. The AGS is therefore limited, disconnected, lacks coherence, relevance and strategic oversight.

The statement compares poorly with other core cities - with varying approaches but with strengths evident e.g. a coherent, comprehensive narrative (Liverpool), ambitious and strategic action planning (Manchester). Some are a mine of useful overall information. Ours is shortest by some distance. There is national concern not only about governance quality but also about AGSs.

Any lack of capacity to produce an AGS of basic, decent and meaningful quality is also a governance issue.

Statement 2. The AGS: openness and scrutiny

Omissions in the AGS include consideration of governance challenges arising from e.g. Fargate containers, street tree inquiry, progression of REC recommendations, housing repair backlogs, partnership working etc. Nor is there mention of governance-relevant developments e.g. City Goals, Involve. The overall approach and these kinds of omissions give the impression of a council out of touch with the public interest, nor open and honest. This is part of a pattern that exacerbates anger, as expressed in Woodhouse ballot boxes last Thursday.

On scrutiny the AGS states "The new Committee governance structure does not require an Overview and Scrutiny function as decisions made in Committee are on a cross party basis." This is wholly misleading to the average reader, both in terms of what scrutiny is (not just about parties) and because scrutiny is essential whatever the governance system. Later it says "Scrutiny is also a central part of Council's decision-making" which appears contradictory, adding confusion.

And a general alarm about scrutiny - Governance Committee now reports scrutiny is behind closed doors ([e.g.in](#) briefings). This does not meet a requirement for scrutiny to be public (and to involve the public). This is part of ongoing basic democratic backsliding evident in this council.