AUDIT, RISK AND GDPR SUB-COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 4TH NOVEMBER 2026

Minutes of the meeting of the **AUDIT, RISK AND GDPR SUB-COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 4TH NOVEMBER 2026** at **7.00pm**

PRESENT

Councillors Arun M. Chandran, Chris Clement, Neil Collinson, and Carl Robinson

OFFICERS

Mr Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Miss Amanda Donald (Corporate and Policy Officer)
Miss Helen Roberts (Finance Manager)
Mrs Vikki Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Joe Callaghan, Clive Owen LLP
Mr Mark Fletcher, Clive Owen LLP
Councillor Tracey Williams
One member of the public

The Town Clerk opened the meeting and welcomed the two representatives from the Council's Internal Audit provider; Clive Owen LLP to the meeting.

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Neil Collinson, that Councillor Carl Robinson be appointed Chairman of the Audit, Risk and GDPR Sub-Committee for the municipal year 2026/27.

RESOLVED – that Councillor Carl Robinson be appointed Chairman of the Audit, Risk and GDPR Sub-Committee for the municipal year 2026/2027.

Councillor Carl Robinson took the chair.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Neil Collinson, that Councillor Chris Clement be appointed Vice Chairman of the Audit, Risk and GDPR Sub-Committee for the municipal year 2026/27.

RESOLVED – that Councillor Chris Clement be appointed Vice Chairman of the Audit, Risk and GDPR Sub-Committee for the municipal year 2026/2027.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tunde Akinsanya, Richard Hutchinson, Sharon Hutchinson and Michael Stead.

4. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

No requests for dispensations had been received.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

6. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

7. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Neil Collinson, and

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Audit, Risk and GDPR Sub-Committee, held on 5th May 2026, be received.

8. INTERNAL AUDIT – INTERNAL ASSURANCE REPORTS

The Council's appointed Internal Auditors Clive Own LLP, submitted two Internal Assurance Reports presenting the findings from their first two internal audit visits for consideration and approval.

Mark Fletcher (Audit and Accounts Assistant Manager) and Joe Callaghan (Associate – Audit and Accounts) from Clive Owen LLP presented a summary of the reports to members.

Mark Fletcher explained that they had been appointed as the Council's Internal Audit provider on a three-year contract, and have undertaken two visits to date. He explained that the recommendations outlined within the reports were colour coded with yellow identifying low risks, amber identifying medium risks and red identifying high risks.

Joe Callaghan took members through the individual recommendations in the report. He noted the limitations of the golf complex staffing structure and emphasised that any action taken in response to the audit recommendations would need to be appropriate and practicable.

Mark Fletcher added that although a number of recommendations had been highlighted, the report should not be taken as critical and that the aim of the recommendations is to support staff and strengthen internal controls.

The Town Clerk added that officers welcomed the recommendations that have been made. At an early meeting with Joe Callaghan, the Town Clerk had highlighted the golf complex as being a high-risk service area, due to staffing structure limitations and the auditors had looked at the risk areas, and made recommendations as to how controls could be strengthened.

Councillor Carl Robinson acknowledged the limitations of the staffing structure in the Golf Shop and asked how many of the recommendations were due to a lack of systems and controls being in place.

Joe Callaghan clarified that the audit had uncovered new issues that were not previously identified in internal audits, but this was not due to staff not following

systems that were in place, rather recommendations to improve systems and controls and support staff.

Councillor Arun M Chandran commented that in the works department recommendations an issue had been referenced where the red diesel meter reading had not been completed, which he presumed presented a risk of internal fraud, so accuracy was important.

Joe Callaghan confirmed that during testing, the accuracy was tested over a number of weeks and he had found no material differences to cause concern. The recommendation related to the completeness of paperwork.

Councillor Chris Clement asked whether the vehicle with an incorrectly recorded registration number on the asset register had been correctly insured.

The Town Clerk confirmed that there was no issue with insurance as all vehicles were recorded correctly on the Motor Insurers Database and the registration error was only on the internal asset register.

Councillor Arun M Chandran asked for a response from the Corporate Management Team to the recommendations.

The Town Clerk explained that the management responses were referenced in the next report.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Neil Collinson that the Internal Assurance Reports be received.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that the Internal Assurance Reports be received.

9. INTERNAL AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS – ACTIONS UPDATE

The Finance Manager and Town Clerk submitted an audit action plan, confirming that all internal audit recommendations for the previous financial year (2025/26) had been actioned prior to the appointment of the new auditors.

It was emphasised that the new auditors found no significant issues with the internal controls in place across the areas audited and no significant concerns had been raised.

It was advised that Internal Audit Recommendations Action Plan had been updated to include all recommendations made in the Internal Assurance Reports.

It was further advised that the three-year Internal Audit Plan had been amended to include further checks of golf shop stocks as recommended as well as to undertake audit checks on cemeteries' procedures and records.

The Town Clerk explained that the Internal Audit Recommendations Action Plan set out the management responses and proposed actions to each recommendation, the responsible officer, progress and completion deadlines. Most actions had already been agreed and implemented as far as practicable.

He advised that the golf complex recommendations were focused on separation of duties as unlike other service areas, the golf complex had only one manager and no additional management layers. The Head of Leisure and Events would therefore be

taking a greater role in overseeing, reviewing and approving stock orders, stock checks and adjustments, subject to other work priorities such as running events.

He further advised that the internal auditor would be undertaking a full independent stock check to establish an accurate baseline.

The Town Clerk reiterated that officers welcomed the improvements arising from the audit review and although staffing constraints would continue to limit the actions, the revised system and controls were stronger and offered greater protection to staff.

Councillor Arun M Chandran proposed agreeing the recommendations. He regretted the Sub-Committee's small size, noting the need for wider recognition of the audit recommendations and actions, and wished to recognise the additional responsibilities placed on the Head of Leisure and Events, whose time was limited.

He asked whether the auditors recommended further consideration of the golf complex staffing structure.

Joe Callaghan clarified that audit recommendations must be proportionate to the Council's size, budgets, and the golf complex's financial viability. Although two staff on duty at all times would be the ideal, this was not viable. The focus was therefore on strengthening controls within existing resources.

Councillor Carl Robinson stressed that procedures must be in place and followed, and further training on the till and booking system will help the Golf Administrator use the system more effectively.

Councillor Arun M Chandran added that clear procedures were needed for future Golf Complex staff and administrators.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Chris Clement and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

i) The report be received.
ii) The Internal Audit Recommendation Action Plan be received.
iii) The updated 2026/27 to 2028/29 Internal Audit Plan be agreed.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE REPORT

The Corporate and Policy Officer submitted a report providing information for the purpose of monitoring the Council's Risk Management Strategy, identifying that no new risks have been added to the register since the Council approved the current risks on 11th March 2026. It was advised that risks are regularly reviewed.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Neil Collinson and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that the report be received.

11. GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION UPDATE

The Corporate and Policy Officer reported on the Council's compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation, confirming that a data audit had been completed and no data breaches had been recorded since the previous report.

Councillor Carl Robinson requested an update on the introduction of gov.uk email addresses for Councillors.

The Corporate and Policy Officer confirmed that most Councillors' accounts had been set up, with the launch planned for the following week or shortly thereafter. Confirmation would be sent by email, and the new addresses would be published on the Council's website.

The Town Clerk added that completing the introduction of gov.uk email addresses would remove one of the remaining barriers to the Council achieving Cyber Essentials accreditation which would further assist in strengthening data security.

The Chairman thanked the internal auditors for attending the meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Neil Collinson and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that the report be received.

Chairman