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Audit and Governance Committee

Date: Monday, 4 August 2025
Time: 6.30 pm
Venue: Council Chamber, County Hall, Dorchester, DT1 1XJ

Members (Quorum: 3)
Gary Suttle (Chair), Spencer Flower (Vice-Chair), Belinda Bawden, Neil Eysenck, Jill Haynes, Andrew Parry, Andy Todd, Beryl Ezzard, Ryan Holloway and Chris Kippax

Co-opted Members: R Ong and S Roach.

Interim Chief Executive: Sam Crowe, County Hall, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XJ

For more information about this agenda please contact Democratic Services Meeting Contact john.miles@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting, apart from any items listed in the exempt part of this agenda. If you would like to attend this meeting and have any specific requirements, please contact the Democratic Services Officer named above.

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Agenda

Item **Pages**

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Representatives of town or parish councils and members of the public who live, work, or represent an organisation within the Dorset Council area are welcome to submit either 1 question or 1 statement for each meeting. You are welcome to attend the meeting in person or via MS Teams to read out your question and to receive the response. If you submit a statement for the committee this will be circulated to all members of the committee in advance of the meeting as a supplement to the agenda and appended to the minutes for the formal record but will not be read out at the meeting. The first 8 questions and the first 8 statements received from members of the public or organisations for each meeting will be accepted on a first come first served basis in accordance with the deadline set out below.

All submissions must be emailed in full to john.miles@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk by 8.30 am on 31st July 2025.

When submitting your question or statement please note that:
- You can submit 1 question or 1 statement.
- A question may include a short pre-amble to set the context.
- It must be a single question and any sub-divided questions will not be permitted.
- Each question will consist of no more than 450 words, and you will be given up to 3 minutes to present your question.
- When submitting a question please indicate who the question is for (e.g., the name of the committee or Portfolio Holder)
- Include your name, address, and contact details. Only your name will be published but we may need your other details to contact you about your question or statement in advance of the meeting.
- Questions and statements received in line with the council's rules for public participation will be published as a supplement to the agenda.
- All questions, statements and responses will be published in full within the minutes of the meeting.

Public Questions – Audit and Governance 4th August 2025

Question from Carole Chedgy:

The swap report (item 6 on the agenda) states at page 7 that its counter fraud team has recently completed an investigation arising from a whistleblowing referral. What was the referral about and what was the outcome?

Question from Torsten Mills:

I will preface this by saying I have no real knowledge of the inner workings of the Council, and have never felt compelled to speak up in the past, so apologies if I am missing the point here somewhat and am misguided in some of my statements below as I'm probably unaware of the full picture.

The health and safety compliance report published on the council website is damning on so many levels, highlighting a complete lack of financial discipline, procedural oversight and mismanagement of what we are told are limited resources at a local government level with acute funding pressures.

What I really fail to grasp is how payments can be made without correct approval, staff can be recruited and pay rises implemented without a paper trail and reserves can be accessed without having to justify every penny spent. It is particularly troublesome where over £1m has been spent annually on internal and external audits combined, yet it was a whistleblower who uncovered the irregularities, despite the figures that are being quoted being well over a material misstatement of sorts.

I'm sure that when the dust settles and investigations are concluded we will be made aware that a criminal investigation has been raised against the terminated employees where appropriate and the suppliers who are guilty of overcharging and providing gifts and hospitality are blacklisted. There has to be significant and decisive consequences for those involved to help restore trust in the Council.

But onwards to the report of internal audit activity. Some of the report is currently obscured due to a formatting issue, but I can't help but feel a little dismayed at reading that a relatively simple financial control – that there is to be "a formal process for requesting work and signing off invoices" within the Place Directorate has been pushed back over a year for action? What the residents of Dorset need to see is definitive action, and I am questioning what the justification is to allow this to be pushed back?

Looking at table 2 of the internal audit plan progress, it is also apparent that not a single department reached the "green" standard of sound system of governance, controls and risk management, with over 40% of departments having a limited opinion showing significant gaps and weaknesses. An internal audit department's role is to report and provide recommendations and there is only so much that can be achieved without a decisive shift in management culture on financial governance, so what is being done at departmental manager level to help facilitate this change?

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