

CIVIC AFFAIRS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

9 March 2026
5.30 - 7.30 pm

Present: Councillors McPherson (Chair), Gawthrop Wood (Vice-Chair), Bennett, Bick, Dalzell, Robertson and Sheil

Also present: Councillor Wade

Officers:

Chief Executive: Robert Pollock

Chief Financial Officer: Jody Etherington

Head of Legal Practice and Monitoring Officer: Tom Lewis

Communities Director: Sam Scharf

Chief Audit Executive: Jonathan Tully

Democratic Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer): Dan Kalley

Democratic Services Officer: Sarah Michael

Meeting Producer: Matthew Hussey

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

26/9/Civ Apologies

There were no apologies from Councillors.

26/10/Civ Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

26/11/Civ Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 23rd February would be submitted to the next meeting for approval.

26/12/Civ Public Questions

There were no public questions.

26/13/Civ Review of Council Constitutional Arrangements

The Committee received a report from the Head of Legal Practice and Monitoring Officer on the review of the Council constitution after nine months of operating with the revised Leader/Cabinet arrangements. The Deputy Leader of the Council also presented a report on the revised terms of reference for the Equalities Panel (Inclusion and Equity Panel).

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

Move to new governance model

- i. Any recommendation to move to a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be taken after seeking views from the Chairs and Members of current committees.
- ii. Nine months was not sufficient time to draw conclusions from the new scrutiny process.
- iii. The report compared Cambridge to other councils with just one scrutiny committee, but some councils have as many as four. There could be grounds for having more than two.
- iv. With Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) approximately two years away, further constitutional changes should only be made if they were operationally compelling.
- v. A dedicated Scrutiny Officer had recently been appointed. The current structure ought to continue to give the officer time to familiarise themselves with it.
- vi. The committees had not yet carried out the full spectrum of responsibilities, for example there had been no deep dives. There was still much to do to properly assess the effectiveness of the current system.
- vii. Would be keen to see the governance model reviewed annually.
- viii. The Committee should look at the terms of reference of the Housing Advisory Board. Could it become a scrutiny committee?
- ix. A single scrutiny committee may put an excessive workload on members.
- x. Two Committees provided more focus on specific issues.
- xi. The new governance structure could leave minority groups and independent councillors without an effective voice inside Council.
- xii. Political groups should be given the opportunity to review the proposals.

Protocol on Member / Officer Relations

- xiii. The new version did not highlight sufficiently the importance of political impartiality for officers working closely with the cabinet.
- xiv. Concerned that the new protocol could discourage Members from approaching officers directly.

- xv. The call centre suggestion may not effectively support the democratic role of a councillor in carrying out casework.
- xvi. The new member induction should include training on how to work with officers, which should also be offered to existing Members.
- xvii. Where officers are required to deal with difficult situations at public events, they should be encouraged to rely on Members for support.
- xviii. Welcomed the emphasis on communications with ward councillors. Officers should reach out to ward councillors for input when devising communications with residents and groups in wards. Better joint working should be promoted.
- xix. Section 3.2 of the existing protocol should be included in the new version.
- xx. Any 'who does what' document should include more than just Directors.
- xxi. The Member role on a regulatory committee should to be made clearer in relation to the ways that Members can deal with planning or licensing matters.

Supplementary Estimates Process

- xxii. Could the supplementary estimates be indexed?
- xxiii. The capital project definition should include the total projected cost of a project, not just the element coming forward as a supplementary estimate.
- xxiv. Could officers highlight occasions on which it had been a problem not to have the supplementary estimates in place in the last year?
- xxv. Should supplementary estimate decisions be brought into the forward plan?
- xxvi. Could the terminology be changed to something more easily understandable than supplementary estimates?

Equalities Panel

- xxvii. It should be clear in the new Equity and Inclusion Panel terms of reference that the changes are intended to remove barriers.
- xxviii. The change to an Equity and Inclusion Panel was a logical progression.
- xxix. The process for selection of members to the Panel was unclear in the current document – it implies that the Leader of the Council would select all members.
- xxx. The Green Group would like the ability to be flexible with regard to who attends the Equity and Inclusion Panel, to be able to send the most appropriate person for the agenda items.

Officers said the following in response to Members' questions:

Protocol on Member / Officer Relations

- i. The intention was to provide officers with guidance on when to engage and when to inform ward councillors.
- ii. The current code of conduct was written pre-social media and the new version addresses that.
- iii. The section around familiarity could be rewritten.
- iv. The intention of the guidance is to determine whether an issue could be dealt with via email and whether the information was already available online. Most cases that couldn't be dealt with via such channels would be complex and require guidance from a senior officer on how to respond, therefore ensuring junior officers were not put under undue pressure.
- v. The intention was not to undermine the casework process, however requests for service would be most effectively addressed through the relevant pre-existing channels.
- vi. Complaints should be logged directly into the complaints system and complex cases should be tracked.
- vii. Permission to act on behalf of a resident should be collected.
- viii. Could look to change the response time from 7 days to 5.
- ix. Officers agreed to provide a revised version to members.

Supplementary Estimates Process

- x. With regard to uprating, the intention was to include clear, round numbers in the constitution.
- xi. Raising the limit of the supplementary estimate would go through the usual constitutional change process.
- xii. Guardrails would be in place to ensure any related proposals were made clear.
- xiii. There would be a requirement for the Section 151 Officer to sign off the process.
- xiv. Specific examples of occasions where a supplementary estimate would have been required in the past were difficult to obtain as the Council had found ways to manage without this process. However, work could be delayed if it had to go to Full Council as a budget bid.
- xv. The supplementary estimate process would make the Council more agile, while maintaining openness and transparency.
- xvi. This would not be a process for taking key decisions but would be subject to the usual Cabinet publication requirements.

Equalities Panel

- xvii. Confirmed that Group Leaders would be able to select Members.

Civic Affairs and Audit Committee **RESOLVED** (unanimously) to **RECOMMEND** to the Annual General Meeting of the Council that:

1. The revised Terms of Reference for the Equalities Panel (to be renamed the Inclusion and Equity Panel) be approved and incorporated into the Council Constitution.

Civic Affairs and Audit Committee **RESOLVED** (unanimously):

2. That the draft Member/Officer Protocol be revised in parts and circulated to all Members for comment by the end of March, with a further report to be brought back to the Committee before any recommendation for approval is made to the Annual General Meeting.
3. That the provisions relating to the limited authority for Cabinet to approve supplementary estimates, specifically additional revenue and capital expenditure up to a defined threshold, be reviewed and circulated to Members for comment by the end of March, with a further report to be presented to the Committee before any recommendation is made to the Annual General Meeting.
4. To note that the Council's Constitution will continue to be kept under regular review, and that any further proposed amendments will be reported to the Committee in due course.
5. To note the draft meeting calendar and provide any comments in advance of the calendar being presented to the Annual General Meeting for formal approval.
6. To request that Full Council approve a full review of the Terms of Reference for the Housing Advisory Board be undertaken, with any proposed changes to be brought forward for approval by the Council at a future meeting when appropriate.

26/14/Civ Risk Management Strategy and Framework Update

Cllr Bick left the meeting during this item and returned at the start of the following item, therefore was ineligible to vote on this item.

The Committee received a report from the Chief Audit Executive on the updated Risk Management Strategy and Framework.

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- i. Welcomed the glossary.
- ii. Had a risk summary been produced and could officers provide a risk SWOT analysis?
- iii. Were there a lot of key risks? How often did these change?
- iv. Could there be a mechanism for informing Committee members of minor changes approved under the scheme of delegation?
- v. Officers should be trained on how to manage the potential problems arising from the framework.

The Chief Audit Executive said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. The Council was a dynamic organisation and risks are reviewed regularly. The key overarching strategic risks tended to be consistent, with more change at the lower operational levels of the risk framework.
- ii. There are quarterly risk checkpoint and reviews, with key risks reported quarterly to Cabinet through the performance management framework.
- iii. Minor changes to the framework could be captured within the quarterly Governance Risk and Control updates to the Committee.
- iv. Officers were trained on how to use the system and how to score risks. Emerging risk trends are communicated internally through risk briefings. Risks added by managers were monitored to assess the bigger picture and internal trends.

The Committee **RESOLVED** (unanimously) to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet:

1. The revised Risk Management Framework and Strategy.

Delegation of authority to approve minor changes and amendments to the Chief Operating Officer.

26/15/Civ Internal Audit Update

The Committee received a report from the Chief Audit Executive which provided an update on internal audit activity, assurance outcomes and strategic developments.

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- i. Welcomed the progress on establishing an audit apprenticeship.

- ii. Welcomed the full, modern termly audit.
- iii. What had been the outcome of the review into Home Upgrade Grant 2? Did the work cover anything the Council could have done differently?
- iv. Was the root cause analysis an additional piece of software or a way to make adaptations to how the audit process worked?
- v. Proposed inclusion of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and ICT into the risk analysis framework.
- vi. Could the apprenticeship also contain work on business analysis?

The Chief Audit Executive said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. The role of internal audit in relation to the Home Upgrade Grant 2 was to review the grant certification.
- ii. The root cause analysis was a process of focussing on key items and establishing the cause, how it could be rectified and prevented from happening again. It is a process of identifying patterns and sharing information to provide managers and the committee with insight.
- iii. LGR would be looked at in terms of preparedness for change and also maintaining the basic key controls to provide assurances to stakeholders. The team was already learning from other authorities who had been through the process.
- iv. With regard to the apprenticeship, the team could additionally look into leveraging skills from other complimentary areas, for example business or data analysis, to supplement the audit work.

The Committee **RESOLVED** (unanimously) to:

1. Note the report.

26/16/Civ Annual Civic Affairs and Audit Committee Report

The Committee received a report from the Chief Audit Executive and the Democratic Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer) on the work of the Civic Affairs and Audit Committee since its inception in May 2025.

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- i. The Committee's role was explained clearly and in a useful way.
- ii. The Committee reviewed and considered partnerships and collaborations – could examples be included?
- iii. Welcomed the inclusion of civic functions within the report.
- iv. Could the Civic Affairs and Audit Committee review the early voting pilot scheme?

The Committee **RESOLVED** (unanimously) to:

1. Approve the draft Annual Civic Affairs and Audit Committee report for submission to Council and the Annual Meeting.
2. Delegate authority to the Chair, in consultation with the Committee, to agree any minor changes to the report before submission to Council.

The meeting ended at 7.30 pm

CHAIR