

Outside Body Briefing



Walsall Council

Council – 29th September 2025

West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) - Audit, Risk & Assurance Committee (ARAC)

1. Role and Function

The role of the WMCA ARAC is to provide an independent and high-level focus on the audit, assurance and reporting arrangements that underpin good governance and financial standards, providing independent assurance to the WMCA on the adequacy of the risk management framework and the internal control environment that flows into the financial reporting and annual governance processes.

As Walsall's representative undertaking this important role on this committee, it's essential that I provide necessary and relevant challenge in relation to the committee's remit and agendas and seek any relevant advice when needed.

2. Progress Overview

Having attended 6 out of the 7 meetings since April 2024 and considering the key assurances being sought from the committee, the key focus areas are deemed as being:

Financial Oversight – Reviewing the WMCA's budget for 2024/25 and ensuring robust financial management practices

Statutory Accounts – Providing updates and oversight on the preparation and publication of statutory accounts

Internal Audit – Overseeing internal audit activities including reviewing audit plans, reports and recommendations

Risk Management – Updating and monitoring the strategic risk register to identify and mitigate key risks

Treasury Management – Implementing and reviewing the treasury management policy, strategy and practices

Information Governance – Reviewing the information governance annual report to ensure compliance with data protection and information security regulations

Programme Assurance – Providing oversight on various programmes to ensure they are delivered effectively and meet their objectives

3. Key Achievements, impact and ongoing work

I personally take my role on the committee very seriously and always compare the key relevant documents to Walsall's as a benchmark and raise relevant points in the committee regarding accounting entries and ensuring the right due diligence and that we can determine value for money has been achieved, key assurances on the implementation of high audit recommendations that have missed their initial deadline as well as testing the key risks, business continuity issues and good governance in how the WMCA operate.

The committee have supported the following key achievements during the period:

Information Governance

The committee reviewed and endorsed the Information Governance Annual Report, ensuring that our data protection and information security practices were up to date and compliant with relevant regulations. This commitment to safeguarding information highlighted our dedication to maintaining the highest standards of data integrity and security.

Health and Safety Initiatives

Through the committee's review and endorsement of several health and safety updates, members were ensuring that the WMCA's practices were current and compliant with regulations. This included implementing new safety protocols and training programs, demonstrating its proactive approach to help create a safe and secure environment for everyone.

Programme and Assurance Updates

The committee provided oversight on various programmes, ensuring they were delivered effectively and met their objectives. By reviewing the progress of key initiatives and providing assurance on their outcomes, the committee reinforced its commitment to excellence and accountability in all its projects.

These efforts reflect members ongoing dedication to transparency, safety and effective governance, ensuring that the WMCA continued to serve the community with integrity and efficiency.

Publishing of the Annual Accounts 2024

The WMCA ARAC was pleased with the prompt publication of its annual accounts 2023/24, highlighting the dedication of committee members, local authority leaders and the finance team to transparency and accountability. By approving and publishing these financial statements, they ensured that stakeholders and the public had access to crucial financial information, reinforcing trust and openness in the WMCA's operations.

Risk Management Improvements

Through reviewing the Strategic Risk Register, identifying and mitigating key risks that could impact the authority's operations, members proactive approach and recommendations has strengthened the overall risk management framework.

Internal Audit Advancements

The engagement of the committee was fundamental to the significant improvements in internal audit processes, including the establishment of a new Internal Audit team at the WMCA, enhancing methodologies and the implementation of recommendations from previous audits, which has led to more efficient and effective internal controls.

4. Looking Ahead

The committee will maintain its commitment to upholding strong governance and effective controls, ensuring that audit recommendations are implemented promptly. This approach aims to drive continuous improvement in systems and processes, and to maximise the value for money delivered by WMCA for the region.

Specifically, some key future work includes:

English Devolution White Paper: What does this mean for Audit?

The WMCA ARAC will work with the WMCA on the implications and further detail on the English Devolution White Paper and what this means for the audit functions of the WMCA.

External Audit Plan 2024/25 and 2025/26

Audit will review the external audit plans prepared by Grant Thornton for the fiscal years 2024/25 and 2025/26. This includes assessing the scope, methodology and timelines for the audits to ensure they align with WMCA's objectives and regulatory requirements.

Internal Audit Plan

An evaluation of the internal audit plans for 2025/26 and 2026/27 will be undertaken, as well as receiving regular update reports for review and discussion. These documents will outline the internal audit strategy, key areas of focus, and progress on ongoing audits, helping the committee monitor internal controls and risk management practices.

Annual Governance Statement

A review of the draft Annual Governance Statement will be undertaken, which provides an overview of WMCA's governance framework and effectiveness.

Approval of Annual Accounts 2024/25

ARAC members will review and approve the annual accounts for the fiscal year 2024/25. This process includes examining the External Audit Findings Report and the External Auditor's Annual Report prepared by Grant Thornton.

Appointment of New Independent Chair

The WMCA have appointed Cecile Booth, who was formerly Peterborough's s151 officer, to chair the Audit, Risk & Assurance Committee for the next term.



Councillor Martin