Audit and Governance Sub-Committee - Armada Way Independent Learning Review Action Plan

Wednesday 14 January 2026

PRESENT:

Councillor Finn, Vice Chair in the Chair.
Councillors Raynsford, Sproston and Stevens (substitute for Councillor Allen).

Apologies for absence: Councillors Allen, Cuddihee and P.Nicholson.

Also in attendance: Si Bellamy (Chief Operating Officer), Liz Bryant (Service Director for Legal Services), Jill Ellis (Head of Operational Development), Pete Honeywell (Transformation Architecture Manager) and Jamie Sheldon (Democratic, Governance and Scrutiny Service Manager).

The meeting started at 12.00 pm and finished at 12.59 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the Panel will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

6. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interests made.

7. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2025 were agreed as an accurate record.

8. Chair's Urgent Business

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

9. Action Plan Progress Update

Liz Bryant (Service Director for Legal Services) introduced the item and highlighted:

a) The Committee had previously indicated satisfaction with the level of progress;

b) Much of the action plan had already been completed at the time of the last meeting;

c) The purpose of this meeting was to provide final confirmation of completion across all areas and seek closure of the action plan.

In relation to Governance, the following update was provided:

d) A substantial review of the constitution had begun, with specific attention on key decision-making thresholds, urgency procedures, use of the forward plan, capital programme governance, and recording of legal advice;

e) Plymouth's key decision thresholds (£1m revenue and £3m capital) were significantly higher than comparable authorities, creating subjectivity around what constituted a significant decision and lower thresholds were recommended in line with national guidance and benchmarking;

f) Officers reviewed urgency procedures, noting they were legally compliant but overly dispersed, requiring consolidation;

g) There was a proposal the Chair of the Scrutiny Management Board be given 24 hours to consider urgency requests, improving transparency and managing complexity;

h) A review of the Forward Plan confirmed compliance with the 28-day rule, but officers recognised that decisions with long lead-in times should appear earlier;

i) Legal implications needed to always be included in decision reports; templates had been amended to reflect this;

j) Pre-election guidance had been externally reviewed, with external legal advice confirming previous concerns about over-restrictiveness during the Armada Way decision period. Revised guidance would be reported to Audit & Governance Committee in March 2026.

In relation to Project and Capital Programme Management, the following update was provided:

k) The Corporate Programme Management Office (CPMO) had progressed significantly since the last meeting;

l) CPMO provided oversight of benefits realisation, budget tracking, risk management, and stakeholder engagement, but did not remove accountability from project teams;

m) The Capital Programme Handbook had been updated following recommendations, and a report would be taken to the Audit and Governance Committee later in 2026.

The following was explained in relation to the Consultation and Engagement element:

n) The consultation and engagement framework was fully embedded. Staff communications had been issued, and training was being developed;

o) WSP Ltd had been appointed to develop the City Centre Vision, fulfilling the requirement for improved strategic direction.

Environmental Regulations updates included the following:

p) The Tree Management Principles document had been reviewed by the Tree Steering Group and the Natural Infrastructure and Growth Scrutiny Panel, and both had expressed support;

q) Senior management had endorsed the document, including additional actions for training and CPMO oversight to ensure compliance;

r) Implementation monitoring would be undertaken to ensure principles did not become static.

In relation to employee wellbeing, the following was discussed:

s) Survey results had been analysed and shared with senior management;

t) Directorate-level action planning was underway.

Si Bellamy (Chief Operating Officer), Pete Honeywell (Transformation Architecture Manager) and Jill Ellis (Head of OD) added:

u) The implemented actions would result in improved oversight, assurance delivery, and how projects interlinked;

v) Project managers were being trained in the basic requirements for all projects, reenforcing this across the organisation and to ensure that the community of project managers were properly supported;

w) The People Strategy presented to Cabinet in December 2025 aligned with many themes from the survey and these issues would be addressed throughout 2026;

x) Procurement of staff safety alert devices was progressing, with implementation targeted for April 2026;

y) The dangerous sites database has been fully designed and completed.

In response to questions, the following was discussed:

z) Committee members emphasised the importance of ensuring constitutional changes were completed alongside major projects, particularly the City Centre Masterplan;

aa) Concerns were raised about reputational risk, emphasising that communication, transparency, and early engagement were essential to prevent misinformation and public distrust and to exist as a 'boundary

function';

bb) Officers confirmed communications were embedded into every major project, with structured links to the CPMO;

cc) Committee Members discussed the need for early Scrutiny involvement in major projects, learning from Armada Way and ensuring information was publicly available to limit misinformation;

dd) The engagement and consultation toolkit was a positive step towards ensuring community voices were present within Council projects from the outset;

ee) The CPMO would standardise risk assessments and elevate high-impact risks to senior management;

ff) Potential for misinformation and different narratives were a risk and a challenge, and so it was important to have a 'single version of the truth' and to present the facts to the best of the Council's knowledge to be clear with communities about expectations, but also to provide more realistic budgets and timeframes as often there needs to be flexibility within these;

gg) The importance of openness and removing unnecessary barriers to public visibility of works and producing accessible and authoritative documents such the Tree Management Principles;

hh) The Council aspired to be an organisation better at learning and was looking to other authorities to learn and benchmark through the LGA (Local Government Association) and Corporate Peer Challenges and was looking to link with the Major Projects Association in the future;

ii) Information would be provided on any employee wellbeing and training improvements that might be available to Councillors **ACTION**;

jj) Projects had benefits they aimed to deliver and the success of a project was measured against these.

The Committee agreed to:

1. Note the progress made to date against the matters reported and the completion of the actions required;

2. Note that the Pre-election guidance would be on the Audit and Governance Committee agenda in March 2026.

10. **Action log**

The Committee noted its action log.