

Audit Committee

23 July 2020



Title	Annual Governance Report		
Purpose of the report	To make a decision		
Report Author	Chief Finance Officer		
Cabinet Member	Not applicable	Confidential	No
Corporate Priority	Financial Sustainability		
Recommendations	The Audit Committee is asked to approve the draft Annual Governance Statement at Appendix 1 and endorse the improvement actions identified in the Statement		
Reason for Recommendation	The Committee has a statutory duty to review and approve on behalf of the Council the Annual Governance Statement.		

1. Key issues

- 1.1 The need to review arrangements for corporate governance and internal control and to produce the Annual Governance Statement (AGS), attached as Appendix 1, is given statutory backing by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The CIPFA/SOLACE governance framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' brings together an underlying set of legislative requirements, governance principles and management processes. Crucially, it states that good governance relates to the whole organisation CIPFA has assigned proper practice status to the governance framework.
- 1.2 It outlines six core principles of governance focusing on the systems and processes for the direction and control of the organisation and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and (where applicable) leads the community. The degree to which the authority follows these principles should be declared in its Annual Governance Statement. It is this statement that has the legal backing of Regulation 4 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations. The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) sets out the framework within which internal control is managed and reviewed and the main components of the system, including the arrangements for internal audit. The AGS also identifies any areas of significant weakness in internal controls, and areas for improvement, and the actions taken to remedy these.
- 1.3 The Annual Governance Statement relates to the system of governance arrangements and internal control as it applied during the financial year in this case, the 2019/20 financial year.

1.4 The Code of Audit Practice states that the AGS and underlying process will form a key piece of evidence for auditors' work on the authority's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness. In summary, the AGS will form an increasingly important part of the external auditors' work and subsequent opinion on the control arrangements of the Council.

- Reviewing the effectiveness of Internal Control
- The scope of internal control spans the whole range of local authority activities and includes those controls designed to ensure that:
- Council policies are put into practice.
- There is compliance with law and regulation.
- Agreed procedures are followed.
- Financial statements and other published information are reliable and accurate.
- There is the efficient and effective use of management and resources in the delivery of high quality services.

The CIPFA statement recommends that the Council should satisfy itself that it has obtained relevant and reliable evidence to support the Statement and sets out an assurance gathering process framework. This framework comprises the following stages:

- Establish principal statutory obligations and organisational objectives
- Identify key risks to their achievement
- Identify and evaluate key controls to manage principal risks
- Obtain assurances on the effectiveness of key controls
- Evaluate and identify gaps in controls and assurances
- Produce an action plan to address gaps and ensure continuous improvement in internal controls
- Produce the Annual Governance Statement
- Report to Committee

The sources of assurance include:

- Published documents (e.g. Constitution)
- Corporate management team and managers throughout the organisation assigned with the ownership of risks and delivery of services
- The Monitoring Officer
- The Responsible Financial Officer
- Internal Audit, particularly informed by the Internal Audit Manager's Annual Report opinion and conclusions.
- External Audit

- Review agencies and inspectorates
- Review of Corporate Risk Register by Management Team; Corporate Risk Management Group; Audit Committee and Cabinet

1.5 In undertaking the review and completing the Annual Governance Review all of the above sources of assurance have been taken into consideration.

1.6 An important source of assurance is provided by the work of Internal Audit and several of the control issues identified in the Statement relate to items identified in the Audit Services' Reports for 2019/20 which have been considered by the Audit Committee, particularly with respect to issues identified in the Corporate Risk Register.

1.7 It is important the actions identified with regard to the control issues are taken forward.

2. Options analysis and proposal

2.1 It is proposed that the Audit Committee approve the Annual Governance Statement for inclusion within the Statement of Accounts for 2019/20.

3. Financial implications

3.1 There are none

4. Other considerations

4.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations require the Statement of Accounts to include a signed off Annual Governance Statement, failure to do so could result in qualification of the accounts

5. Equality and Diversity, and Sustainability

5.1 Effective governance controls aid in mitigating risks with respect to equality, diversity and sustainability

6. Timetable for implementation

6.1 Not applicable.

Background papers:

Appendices: Appendix 1: Annual Governance Statement