

WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL**ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2022/23****1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require the Council to prepare an annual governance statement.
- 1.2 Governance is about how an organisation is directed and controlled to achieve its objectives. It therefore comprises the systems, structures, and values that an organisation has in place to achieve those objectives. Good governance requires that objectives be achieved not only efficiently and effectively but also ethically and in compliance with laws and recognised standards of conduct.
- 1.3 Good governance comprises robust systems and sound structures together with effective leadership and high standards of behaviour.
- 1.4 In short, governance is "Doing the right things, in the right way."

2 The Purpose of the Annual Governance Statement

- 2.1 This Statement provides a summarised account of how Warwick District Council's processes and structures meet the principles of good governance set out in the Council's Constitution and how assurance is obtained that these are effective and appropriate. It is written to provide the reader with a clear and straightforward assessment of how the governance framework has operated over the past financial year (but also up to the time of approval of the financial statements) and to identify any weaknesses or gaps in our arrangements that need to be addressed.
- 2.2 The format and scope of this Statement follows that which is prescribed by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

3 The Council's Governance Framework

- 3.1 Warwick District Council must operate in accordance with the law and appropriate standards and ensure that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently, and effectively.
- 3.2 Warwick District Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to try to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised.
- 3.3 In discharging these responsibilities Warwick District Council is responsible for putting in place suitable governance arrangements, including provisions for the management of risk.
- 3.4 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture, and values by which the authority is directed and controlled as well as its activities

through which it accounts to, engages with, and leads its communities. It enables the authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate services and value for money.

- 3.5 The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve aims and objectives and can therefore provide only reasonable, not absolute, assurance of effectiveness.
- 3.6 Warwick District Council has approved and adopted a Local Code of Corporate Governance that is consistent with the principles of the latest CIPFA/SOLACE¹ Framework for Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (2016).
- 3.7 The Council's current business strategy (known as Fit for the Future (FFF)) sets out the Council's objectives and priorities for the district and how these are to be achieved. The strategy is based around five themes and is used to identify and prioritise the work programme up to 2023. Officers will shortly commence work on a draft business strategy in readiness for discussions with the new administration to be elected in May 2023.
- 3.8 Delivery of the Council's business strategy is through the Service Area Plans in which the corporate objectives are translated into more specific aims and objectives. These are then fed down into individual performance development reviews through the Council's performance appraisal system. These include agreed expectations and, where appropriate, service standards against which service quality and improvement can be judged. Performance is monitored by individual services and made available to all Councillors and Senior Officers through SharePoint. Through the last year training and individual support for Councillors on using this data has been offered.
- 3.9 Warwick District Council's Constitution establishes the roles and responsibilities for members of the Cabinet, Audit and Standards (A&S) Committee, Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) Committee, together with officer functions.
- 3.10 The Council revised its Scrutiny arrangements in May 2022, with scrutiny being undertaken by just one committee – the Overview and Scrutiny committee – with the scrutiny function being removed from the Finance & Audit Committee evolving into an Audit & Standards Committee but with the predominance of work being audit-related. In addition, a Budget Review Group was established, with a focus on reviewing key financial reports, including the setting of the fees and charges and the setting of the annual budgets for the General Fund and HRA. This has continued to present challenges in establishing a firm understanding of the new roles and functions.
- 3.11 The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee has also identified several other issues with the operation of the revised Overview & Scrutiny Committee, as follows:
 - The breadth and volume of the Committee's workload.

¹ Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy / Society of Local Authority Chief Executives

- The presentation of Cabinet reports that mitigate effective scrutiny of them.
- The range of skills that are required by the Committee to enable effective scrutiny, particularly in respect of financial expertise.

With regard to the last item, there is a feeling that the issue is wider than this, being about member engagement in finance generally, and the intention is to make training in respect of this topic mandatory for all Councillors post-election.

- 3.12 Similarly, the Chair of Audit & Standards has expressed concerns, in particular regarding clarity around the roles of the two committees and the pattern of meetings.
- 3.13 The Constitution includes details of delegation arrangements, the Councillors' Code of Conduct, and protocols for councillor/officer relations. From May 2022 the Council has operated under the Local Government Association Model Code of Conduct for Councillors. The Constitution is kept under review to ensure that it continues to be fit for purpose and within the year there has been a number of minor revisions. The Council has adopted a Standards regime pursuant to the Localism Act 2011 and appointed the Audit & Standards Committee to be responsible for such matters. Conduct of officers is governed through the Employee Code of Conduct and through the values and behaviours which are part of the Council's individual performance appraisal system.
- 3.14 The Constitution contains procedures, rules and financial regulations that define clearly how decisions are taken and where authority lies for decisions. The statutory roles of Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer and Chief Financial Officer are described together with their contributions to provide robust assurance on governance and ensure expenditure is lawful and in line with approved budgets and procedures. The influence and oversight exerted by these posts is backed by post-holders' membership (whether permanent or 'as required') of the Senior Leadership Team² (SLT).
- 3.15 In 2010 CIPFA published a statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) in local government, setting out core principles and standards relating to the role of the CFO and how it fits into the organisation's governance arrangements.
- 3.16 A specific statement is required to be reported in the Annual Governance Statement on whether the authority's financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement.
- 3.17 The governance requirements in the CIPFA Statement are that the CFO should be professionally qualified, report directly to the Chief Executive and be a member of the Leadership Team³, with a status at least equivalent to other members of the team. The Statement requires that if different organisational arrangements are adopted the reasons should be explained publicly in the

² The Senior Leadership Team comprises heads of services together with the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive and Programme Director for Climate Change.

³ In the Council's case, this is the Senior Leadership Team.

Council's Annual Governance Report, together with how these deliver the same impact.

- 3.18 The Council's financial management arrangements conform to the CIPFA Statement other than in just one specific aspect:
- Head of Finance having responsibility for Asset Management (that is to say, the Head of Finance does not have responsibility for the Assets function).
- 3.19 With regard to asset management, responsibility for this comes under the post of Head of Neighbourhood and Assets. As with all heads of services, the Head of Neighbourhood and Assets is part of the Senior Leadership Team. The Council is firmly of the view that this is the best way to deliver this service.
- 3.20 The Cabinet provides the strategic direction for the Council, ensuring that the Council's priorities are established and that corporate objectives are set and achieved. In order to strengthen cross-party leadership of the Council's business, the Leader of the Council invited all the Council's Political Group Leaders to join the Cabinet on a non-Constitutional forum known as the Leadership Coordination Group (LCG). The role of the LCG is to try to ensure that there is a unified cross-party response to the challenges facing the Council. This forum is used to review all draft Cabinet reports and receive officer briefings on the most important Council matters. It has enabled the Council's business to continue unabated despite no one party or coalition having a majority.
- 3.21 The primary counterbalances to the Cabinet are the Audit and Standards Committee and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The roles of these committees include the opportunity to provide a robust challenge to the Cabinet.
- 3.22 'Task and Finish' Groups, comprising solely councillors, are appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to examine issues in detail. These Groups report back to the Committee with recommendations on improvements which are, when approved, taken forward.
- 3.23 The Audit and Standards Committee fulfils the core functions of a typical 'audit committee' in respect of External Audit, Internal Audit and Risk Management. The Committee seeks assurance from the relevant Cabinet Councillor (Portfolio Holder) and/or senior manager when it has concerns or queries in respect of matters relating to particular service areas.
- 3.24 The Council has a formal complaints procedure that allows the public or other stakeholders to make a complaint regarding the service received or the conduct of Councillors. The Audit and Standards Committee has responsibility for overseeing the investigation of complaints against Councillors. Mandatory training on Standards was provided to Members in May 2023. Overall, the Council continues to have a low volume of complaints but is committed to reviewing its complaints policy & procedures within the next 12 months to ensure they are robust.

- 3.25 The Council has policies to help safeguard the organisation and its staff when making decisions. An Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and set of Policies and Procedures – comprising a Fraud Response Plan, Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure, Money Laundering Policy and Procedure, and Bribery Act 2010 Policy and Procedure - have been developed and communicated to all staff via the intranet and as part of the employee induction process. Councillors review the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and the Whistleblowing Policy annually.
- 3.26 The Council has embedded Risk Management throughout its arrangements with the Significant Business Risk Register (in effect, the Council's corporate and strategic risk register) being reviewed and updated each quarter, firstly by the Senior Leadership Team and then by Cabinet who assumes overall responsibility for it. It is also considered by the Audit and Standards Committee.
- 3.27 Council services are delivered by staff with the appropriate skills, training, and level of experience. Job Descriptions and Person Specifications are in place for all posts and, together with a rigorous recruitment and selection process, this helps to ensure that the best candidates are appointed into each position. A significant commitment has also been made towards retaining skilled staff by offering numerous 'work friendly' schemes and where possible encouraging succession planning and promotion from within. This ensures that valuable skills and experience are retained and passed on, rather than being lost. Training needs are identified through the performance appraisal system.
- 3.28 The individual performance appraisal system has been operated in the Council for many years, having been subject to regular review and refinement. Staff are measured against operational objectives that derive from the Business Strategy. The performance appraisal system also identifies learning and developmental needs to ensure that appropriate training is provided to staff to enable them to undertake their role effectively and have the opportunity to develop.
- 3.29 Programme Advisory Boards (PABs) have further developed in the year with one for each Portfolio Area. The PABs act in an advisory/guidance capacity in developing the projects/policies of Warwick District Council and, in doing so, enable backbench members to have greater involvement in shaping the executive decisions of the Council, particularly on services, key projects and programmes (but not day-to-day operations). This also helps to utilise the skills, knowledge, and talent of Councillors in a more effective way. There were further refinements to their operation for the current municipal year and it is recognised there is still inconsistent delivery of them. The intention is for them to continue after the election in May but there needs to be a clear understanding of their role and accountability for them. It is intended that the Democratic Services Manager will, after the election, meet with the Leader of the Council and fellow Group Leaders to discuss concerns regarding the operation of the PABs and that, prior to any appointment to the PAB, a briefing session will be provided for relevant Councillors on the role of the PABs. In addition, the Democratic Services Manager plans to attend the first meeting of each PAB to provide training and guidance on the role of Members working on

PABs. Finally, the Democratic Services Manager intends to monitor the PAB meetings and discuss with Group Leaders on a quarterly basis.

- 3.30 The Council has also established a joint advisory group of Councillors and a Joint Cabinet Committee with Stratford-on-Avon District Council in respect of the South Warwickshire Local Plan. These have continued despite the decision by Members from both Councils not to proceed with a proposed merger.
- 3.31 The Council strives to be open and accessible to the community. All communication is delivered across a combination of platforms, including website, social media, press releases, and printed leaflets and posters, to ensure it is accessible to all residents. In addition, consultations and surveys are carried out to encourage engagement and seek the views of residents when developing new policies and initiatives.
- 3.32 All Council committee meetings are open to the public, except where confidential matters are concerned and broadcast via YouTube. Agendas and minutes for Council meetings are placed on the website along with the Council's policies and strategies. Councillors are encouraged to submit questions in advance of committee meetings, to maximise the time available in formal meetings and enable greater focus on specific areas of concern. The responses to these pre meeting questions are made available to the public on the website.
- 3.33 There are terms of reference and constitutions set up for key partnerships that ensure that partners act lawfully throughout the decision-making process. Key partnerships include the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership and Community Safety Partnership. Warwick District Council also works closely with a number of other councils and agencies and operates shared services for Building Control, Business Rates, Corporate Fraud and Legal Services.
- 3.34 The Council complies with the 2015 Local Government Transparency Code by publishing specific information on the Council's website in prescribed format. The Council strives to publish information on the website that is accessible and understandable for the public and continues to seek to make improvements in this. An example of this is achievement of the required Website Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1). The Council's website accessibility is independently audited every two years and in monthly automated tests carried out by Silktide (who rate all Local Authority websites according to their compliance with WCAG 2.1) WDC has consistently achieved the highest ranking of any Warwickshire local authority over the past 12 months.
- 3.35 As a key element of the governance framework, Internal Audit reviews are undertaken regularly on a range of activities including one undertaken annually on an alternating aspect of governance.
- 3.36 The Governance framework for Milverton Homes is set out in the Articles of Association and the Shareholders Agreement. The latter sets out the parameters for decision making and requires the company to prepare and submit for approval an annual Business Plan, audited accounts, quarterly performance reports, cash flow statements and cash flow forecasts for the

company. Work is still ongoing to ensure that these crucial governance arrangements are in operation. Reserved Matters as detailed in Schedule 2 of the Agreement, may not be carried out without the prior written consent of WDC as Shareholder. The company is only able to carry out business in accordance with its Business Plan which must be approved annually by the Cabinet.

- 3.37 The Council has appointed two Council Directors in accordance with the Articles of Association. It retains the right to appoint any person to be a Council Director and may remove from office any Council Director. The Council appointed the Chair who has a casting vote if the number of votes for and against a proposal at a meeting of Directors are equal. The Directors must ensure that the Company keeps a record, in writing, for at least ten years from the date of the decision recorded of every unanimous or majority decision taken by the Directors. The Council, as sole shareholder, may by special resolution direct the directors to take, or refrain from taking, specified actions.
- 3.38 A re-emerging issue for the new Council will be its role in the region and particularly its non-membership of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). At present it only has Observer status whereas all the other authorities in the region are either constituent or non-constituent members. In the context of the Trailblazer Deal the WMCA has just signed with Central Government, the Council may need to revisit what role it would like to play on this body and explore how it is possible to fulfil any aspiration it has.

4 Review of Effectiveness

- 4.1 Warwick District Council is required legally to conduct an annual review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of managers within the authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Audit & Risk Manager's annual report, annual service assurance statements completed by heads of services and by the findings and reports issued by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.
- 4.2 More information on the arrangements that provide this assurance is set out below.
- 4.3 The Council's Monitoring Officer (also Deputy Chief Executive) has responsibility for overseeing the implementation and operation of the Council's Code of Corporate Governance, maintaining and updating the Code in the light of latest guidance on best practice, contemplating any changes that may be necessary to maintain it and ensure its effectiveness. All reports to Cabinet, Committees and Council are seen by the Monitoring Officer to ensure compliance with legal requirements.
- 4.4 The Council's Section 151 Officer has responsibility for the proper administration of the Council's finances. This includes responsibility for maintaining and reviewing the Code of Financial Practice and Code of Procurement Practice to ensure they remain fit for purpose and submitting any

additions or changes necessary to Council for approval. The Section 151 Officer is also responsible for reporting any significant breaches of the Codes to the Cabinet and/or the Council. All reports to Cabinet, Committees and Council are seen by appropriate staff within the Finance Department to ensure compliance with financial requirements.

- 4.5 The CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Public Service Organisations requires the head of internal audit to give an opinion annually to the Authority on its risk management, governance, and control environment and that this should be used as a primary source of evidence for the annual governance statement. In regard to this, the Audit and Risk Manager's Annual Report and Opinion for 2022/23 has concluded that, in overall terms, the Council has an effective internal control and governance environment. This statement is based, however, on those audits that were able to be completed - the inability to complete three planned ICT audits inevitably qualifies this assurance.
- 4.6 In addition to the above, the Council has conducted a formal review of its internal control environment and collated evidence and assurance from a variety of sources. This has included assurances, set out on "service assurance statements", from heads of services on the effectiveness of the internal control environment. The Statements did not reveal any issues of significant concern.
- 4.7 The work of the Council's Internal Audit function is governed by the UK Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). The PSIAS are mandatory for all internal auditors working in the UK public sector. The Standards require an external and independent assessment at least every five years of the performance of public sector internal audit units and their conformance with the PSIAS.
- 4.8 Under regulation 13 of the Local Audit (Appointing Person) Regulations 2015, Grant Thornton was appointed as the Council's External Auditor with responsibility for reviewing the Council's Statements of Accounts for five years from 2018/19 to 2022/23. The auditors are still continuing their work on reviewing the 2021/22 Statement of Accounts and are expected to issue a formal opinion on the Council's arrangements, including those relating to securing value for money, before commencement of the 2022/23 audit, which is due to take place in December 2023. It is expected that they will conclude that the Council had made proper arrangements in all significant respects to secure economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in its use of resources.
- 4.9 In December 2022, under the same set of Regulations, Azets Audit Services Limited were appointed as the Council's External Auditor for the next set of five years - 2023/24 to 2027/28.
- 4.10 In December 2020, the Council's Executive approved the formation of a Local Housing Company. The Company – Milverton Homes Ltd. – is a separate legal entity, wholly-owned by the Council, set up to support the Council's housing development plans and objectives and provide the Council with housing-related commercial opportunities. The Company is 'Teckal-exempt' which means that, because it is wholly-owned by the Council and at least 80% of the work is for the Council, the Council can pass work to the Company without

exposing it to competitive tender and the Company will be exempt from corporation tax.

- 4.11 The Teckal exemption is, however, subject to certain critical tests – the control test and the functional test. The control test means that the Council must control all the shares in the Company and exercise effective day-to-day control over its affairs; thus the relationship between the authority and the company is the same as the relationship between the authority and its internal services departments. The functional test ensures that the essential activities undertaken by the company are controlled by the Council.
- 4.12 Fortus, the External Auditor of Milverton Homes, is responsible for reviewing the accounts and financial systems of the company. The External Auditor supports the presentation of accounts to the shareholders at the Annual General Meeting (AGM), thus providing assurance to Shareholders. During the year, the Deputy Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer undertook the role of Shareholder Representative in liaison between the company and the Council.
- 4.13 A review of the governance arrangements in respect of Milverton Homes was undertaken by the Audit and Risk Manager and a report will be submitted to Cabinet in August 2023 that comprehensively addresses the review's findings.
- 4.14 Cabinet agreed to establish a change management programme to ensure that a co-ordinated approach to service development is in place. A programme has now been established, being launched with a managers workshop on 22 February 2024.

5 Update on Joint Working and Merger with Stratford-on-Avon District Council

- 5.1 During 2020/21 the international accountancy and consultancy firm, Deloitte, was commissioned to undertake a review of the financial and non-financial benefits of integration between Warwick District Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council, up to and including the possibility of a full merger between the organisations.
- 5.2 The principal recommendation from Deloitte was that to achieve the maximum potential financial and non-financial benefits for the residents of South Warwickshire a full merger of the two councils should be considered. (The report can be viewed by clicking on the following link: [Deloitte Report.](#))
- 5.3 In December 2021 both Councils committed to seeking a full merger to create a new single statutory council for South Warwickshire by April 2024.
- 5.4 By the end of the 2021/22 financial year, the following progress towards a merger of the two councils had been made:
- A public consultation exercise on the proposals had been undertaken.
 - Approval for the merger had been sought from the Secretary of State.
 - Operational integration between the two authorities was well advanced with all heads of services being joint appointments and some services being either jointly provided or provided from one authority to both.

- In relation to joint contracts and arrangements, the Waste Management Contract had been procured jointly.
- A detailed paper on preparing a Local Plan for South Warwickshire had been agreed.
- Several key policies had been aligned, including:
 - Joint Organisational Change Policy Statement
 - Joint Redeployment Policy and Procedure
 - Joint Redundancy Policy and Procedure.

- 5.5 However, following a meeting between Council Leaders and Chief Executives on 14 April 2022, the Leader of Stratford-on-Avon District Council wrote to the Secretary of State to request a delay pending further due diligence to be completed on Milverton Homes, a company set up and wholly-owned by Warwick District Council. Conversely, the Leader of Warwick District Council considered that ongoing due diligence should not prevent the service integration progressing as planned and felt that delaying the merger would create further uncertainty for residents seeking assurances about local services as well as greater uncertainty for staff, especially those facing redundancy, The Leader of Warwick District Council felt that further delay would result in trust being undermined, making it untenable for the two authorities to further integrate services or merge.
- 5.6 Consequently, the Leaders of both authorities concluded that the proposed merger could not go ahead as planned. It was felt that there was a significant difference between the approaches and ambitions of the two councils that were irreconcilable and that a joint request should now be made to the Government to cancel the merger process.
- 5.7 Some of the joint working arrangements already put in place are planned to continue, such as legal services and business rates collection. Others, however, including the Joint Management Team and the service integration programme, have ended.
- 5.8 Throughout the timeline of the merger, a communications and engagement plan ensured regular updates and engagement with staff from both councils. The plan included Joint staff briefings from both Chief Executives, Service Managers updates, team talks and regular liaison with Staff Voice and Unison reps from both councils. A new intranet page was developed to hold updates from committee meetings and minutes from Senior Management meetings. Staff from both councils could submit questions to that page and subsequently view all the answers.
- 5.9 Communication aimed to share the benefits of the proposed merger, as well as the impact of it not proceeding. Feedback to the joint site indicated a mixed response, from understanding the rationale, to concern about the impact on the Warwick DC identity.
- 5.10 It was recognised that the process impacted upon staff adversely. Clearly this can have implications for governance and therefore, immediately following the decision to cancel the merger, the process began to rebuild the relations with staff. This started as Chief Executive-led meetings with service managers, their teams and comprehensive communication activities. An Applause

package Part 1 was developed and agreed by Councillors which has done much to restore staff morale and as part of the budget proposals the Council has made provision for a Recruitment, Retention and Remuneration Package which has been well-received by members of staff. In addition, the Council has agreed additional recruitment, retention and remuneration measures including an additional increment payment for all WDC employees for 2023/24 and for 2024/25.

- 5.11 The achievement of the 'Thrive' well-being award demonstrates the organisation's commitment to supporting staff in all aspects of health.
- 5.12 The Chief Executive has held a number of staff briefings to continue to update members of staff which will continue alongside other communication steps such as a weekly 5 things you need to know and a weekly letter from the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council.
- 5.13 The Council has now decided to vacate Riverside House and relocate its headquarters to a Warwickshire County Council office based in Warwick. This will be a landlord/tenant relationship with a break clause after three years enabling the Council to move elsewhere should it wish. A face-to-face service will remain in Leamington operating out of the Pump Rooms. Furthermore, the Council has agreed to sell Riverside House. It is anticipated that the conveyance will be completed by the end of April 2024. At the time of drafting this Statement, the proposed purchaser's details are private and confidential.

6 Significant Governance Issues

- 6.1 The following governance issues have been identified:
 - 6.1.1 The breadth and volume of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's workload.
 - 6.1.2 The presentation of Cabinet reports that mitigate effective scrutiny of them.
 - 6.1.3 The range of skills that are required by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to enable effective scrutiny, particularly in respect of financial expertise.
 - 6.1.4 The lack of clarity over the role and operation of Programme Advisory Boards.
- 6.2 These issues are included in an action plan, progress against which is monitored quarterly by the Council's Senior Leadership Team and by the Audit and Standards Committee.
- 6.3 The significant governance issues raised in last year's annual governance statement have all been addressed. This can be confirmed in Appendix 1, below.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The governance framework described in this document has been in place at Warwick District Council for the year ended 31 March 2023 and up to the date of approval of the annual statement of accounts.

7.2 We confirm our commitment to implementation of actions to address the governance issues identified in this Statement (and summarised in Section 6, above).

Signed:

Councillor Andrew Day
Leader of the Council during 2022/23

Dated:

22 October 2024

Signed:

Councillor Ian Davison
Leader of the Council

Dated:

22 October 2024

Signed:

Christopher Elliott
Chief Executive

Dated:

22 October 2024

WDC Annual Governance Statement 2021/22: Action Plan for Governance Issues

AGS Ref.	Governance Issue	Responsibility	Progress to Date:	
			Previously-reported Positions	Latest Position
7.1	Performance management continues to be an issue, in particular the range and content of performance data that Councillors receive. When resolved, Councillors will need to be trained to enable them to access the information and scrutinise it effectively.	Senior Leadership Team	<p>End-July 2022: Cabinet has agreed the Council's Service Area Plans including the suite of measures for each Service Area. Officers are now working on making the measures accessible to Councillors so the measures can be interrogated on a rolling basis. Target for completion of this work is 1 September 2022.</p> <p>End-October 2022: These are now available via <i>Sharepoint</i> for all Councillors who have been briefed on how to access them. There is also a training session for Councillors on these which they have been invited to on 7 November 2022. In addition to this, the Performance Management Officer is now liaising with Heads of Services on migrating Service Area Risk Registers into the same documents to enable Members to have easier access to these as well.</p>	The risk registers are now available for Councillors to inspect in the single document and should be being reviewed by the relevant Head of Service at least quarterly.

AGS Ref.	Governance Issue	Responsibility	Progress to Date:	
			Previously-reported Positions	Latest Position
7.2	The new Overview & Scrutiny and Audit & Standards Committees will present challenges in terms of clarity of role. Councillors will need to be trained on the operation of the new Overview & Scrutiny and Audit & Standards Committees to enable them to participate more confidently.	Senior Leadership Team	<p>End-July 2022: Training has been arranged for 3 August 2022 for the Audit & Standards Committee on the role of the Audit Committee. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee have also been invited to attend. Civic & Committee Services are in the process of organising training for the Members of Overview & Scrutiny Committee on financial/budget and performance training which once agreed Audit & Standards members will also be invited to attend.</p> <p>In respect of remit it is early days for the new Committees and this will be discussed with the relevant Chairs before each meeting.</p> <p>End-October 2022: Training has taken place for Councillors of both these Committees in relevant areas and positive feedback has been received.</p> <p>There will need to be a continued theme of briefing Audit & Standards Members in respect of new aspects along with detailed Treasury Management training. However, the focus on this aspect will be very much after elections in May 2023.</p>	The training plan for post-election is being developed around core themes and responsibilities of Councillors. There will be a report on this to the Audit & Standards Committee in February.

AGS Ref.	Governance Issue	Responsibility	Progress to Date:	
			Previously-reported Positions	Latest Position
7.3	Staff morale has been impacted adversely as a result of the merger process. A strategy to improve staff morale is required.	Senior Leadership Team	<p>End-July 2022: Cabinet has approved "Applause" which seeks to help address staff morale through several personal, professional and health initiatives. More broadly, the Senior Leadership Team is working on policies in respect of recruitment, retention, and reward. This is an ongoing piece of work.</p> <p>End-October 2022:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The positive feedback from the 'Applause' scheme launched August 2022 has considerably impacted on staff morale by including the range of support and recognition including monetary, health, team 'get-togethers', 'refer a friend' for recruitment and voluntary days off. It is important to recognise that this was not planned as a 'one-off' initiative and the benefits are being realised on an ongoing basis with regular updates through engagement and communication. ➤ An externally assessed 'staff survey' and facilitated face to face sessions linked to the 'Thrive award' was launched the beginning of October in conjunction with Unison. Further analysis is expected in December to inform further actions to support the health and well-being of staff. <p>(Continued overleaf)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The impact of the Applause initiative launched in Aug 2022 continues to resonate across the Council with over 60 staff to date who have received the 'Health Check' which includes mental well-being, menopause, diet, and any other areas of support requested. ➤ There have been many examples of staff using the 'team get-together funding' for Christmas and other meetings. ➤ We are pleased to announce the achievement of the Bronze award for 'Thrive'. This accreditation has included considerable evidence based qualitative and quantitative information as well as face to face meetings and a staff survey which has been promoted in conjunction with Unison. The awards ceremony in November included an acceptance speech from Cllr Jody Tracey, Chris Elliott, Chief Executive, and key members of the team who co-ordinated the award including a special mention to Karen Weatherburn, Learning & Development Officer. Further analysis on the report is planned for Jan 2023.

AGS Ref.	Governance Issue	Responsibility	Progress to Date:	
			Previously-reported Positions	Latest Position
7.3 (Cont.)			<p>➤ Targeted 'awareness' campaigns continue to inform and engage managers and staff. October links to the education and support linking with Unison on the 'Menopause', from all aspects and different perspectives.</p> <p>A report for Employment Committee 29.11.22 will include positive updates on the WDC Apprenticeship scheme and further plans to 'grow our own'.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An update was provided to the last PAB on the area of Health & Well-being and the progress within the organisation to support this key area. The Well-being of our staff is an ongoing priority with emphasis on blended support through training, briefings, and other sources. - Dedicated intranet pages to health and well-being for resources and signposting as well as regular reminders of what help is available recently updated to include support for the Menopause based on our awareness session in October Manager's Forum - Communications continues to be a key area to support our staff with the weekly '5 things' e-mail some examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Black History Month - Updates on our Portfolio Holders - Cost of living support - Thrive Survey - An Action for Happiness calendar to support Health and Wellbeing. <p>Our Staff Voice group continues to monitor and review the internal projects, providing regular feedback to the Transformation Steering Group.</p>

AGS Ref.	Governance Issue	Responsibility	Progress to Date:	
			Previously-reported Positions	Latest Position
7.3 (Cont.)				<p>The Apprenticeship update to Employment Committee 29.11.22 details:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funded opportunities for 23 apprenticeships. - To date 10 have secured alternative employment with the Council – this includes five in the last year. - 5 are still undertaking their apprenticeships. - 8 successfully completed their apprenticeships and left for other opportunities. - We are in the process of recruiting 5 more apprentices.

DRAFT