

**WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL****ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2016/17****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 in order 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 more esoteric characteristics such as effective leadership and high standards of behaviour. 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 our management arrangements are set up to meet the principles of good governance set out in our Constitution and how we obtain assurance that these are both effective and appropriate. It is written to provide the reader with a clear, simple assessment of how the governance framework has operated over the past financial year and to identify any improvements made and any weaknesses or gaps in our arrangements that need to be addressed.

**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 make arrangements 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 and 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 and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.
- 3.6 Warwick District Council has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance that is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE<sup>1</sup> Framework for Delivering Good Governance in Local Government.
- 3.7 The Council's Corporate Strategy is the Sustainable Community Strategy which draws together a shared vision, setting out the Council's objectives and priorities for the District and how these are to be achieved.
- 3.8 It is complemented by the Fit For the Future change programme and together these represent the key planning documents for the Council.
- 3.9 Delivery of the Council's change programme 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 all include agreed expectations and, where appropriate, service standards against which service quality and improvement can be judged. Performance is monitored by individual services.
- 3.10 Warwick District Council has adopted a Constitution that establishes the roles and responsibilities for members of the Executive, Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee, Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Standard Committees, together with officer functions. It includes details of delegation arrangements, the Members' Codes of Conduct and protocols for member/officer relations. The Constitution is kept under review to ensure that it continues to be fit for purpose. The Council has adopted a Standards regime pursuant to the Localism Act 2011 and appointed a Standards Committee from 1 July 2012. 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.
- 3.11 The Constitution contains procedure 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 that 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 Corporate Management Team.
- 3.12 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.

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

- 3.13 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.
- 3.14 The governance requirements in the Statement are that the CFO should be professionally qualified, report directly to the Chief Executive and be a member of the Leadership Team, with a status at least equivalent to other members. The Statement requires that if different organisational arrangements are adopted the reasons should be explained publicly in the authority's Annual Governance Report, together with how these deliver the same impact.
- 3.15 The Head of Finance has confirmed that the Council's financial management arrangements conform to the CIPFA Statement other than in three specific aspects:
- Head of Finance reporting directly to Chief Executive.
  - Head of Finance being a member of Leadership Team.
  - Head of Finance having responsibility for Asset Management.
- 3.16 The Council's view is that the way it operates – the Head of Finance's regular attendance at Corporate Management Team/Executive meetings, budget planning meetings, and numerous ad-hoc meetings – enables the officer to have unhindered access to the most senior officer as well as senior members. The Head of Finance reports to the Deputy Chief Executive/Monitoring Officer. This approach has subsisted for several years without any apparent problems; consequently, the Council considers that the risk of there being any detriment to the authority is low.
- 3.17 With regard to asset management, responsibility for this comes under the Head of Housing & Property Services as that is where the expertise and the operational work lies. (Housing and Property functions are to be separated from 2017/18.)
- 3.18 The Council will continue to keep all reporting and responsibility arrangements under review and will discuss any perceived shortcomings with the Council's external auditors if and when they arise.
- 3.19 The primary counterbalances to the Executive are the Finance & Audit Scrutiny and the Overview & Scrutiny Committees. The role of these committees is to provide a robust challenge to the Executive.
- 3.20 The Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee monitors the performance of the Council, fulfilling the Council's audit committee core functions in respect of External Audit, Internal Audit and Risk Management. The Committee can, and does, request assurance from the relevant Executive member (Portfolio Holder) and/or senior manager when it has concerns or queries, or simply requires assurance, in respect of a matter relating to a particular service area.
- 3.21 The Council has a formal complaints procedure which allows the public or other stakeholders to make a complaint regarding the service received from the Council or on the conduct of Members. The Standards Committee has responsibility for overseeing the investigation of complaints against Members.

- 3.22 The Council has policies to safeguard both itself and its staff when making decisions. An Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and Policies, including the Council's Fraud Response Plan, Whistleblowing, Money Laundering and Bribery Act 2010 Policies have been developed and communicated to all staff via the intranet and as part of the Staff Induction process. The Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and the Whistleblowing Policy are reviewed by Members annually.
- 3.23 The Council has embedded Risk Management throughout its activities 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 Management Team and then by the Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee before finally reaching the Executive.
- 3.24 Council services are delivered by trained and experienced officers. 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 good 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.
- 3.25 The individual performance appraisal system has been operated in the council for a number of years, having been reviewed and subsequently refined on several occasions. Staff are measured against operational objectives that are linked through to the Corporate Strategy and Fit For the Future via service objectives. The performance appraisal system also identifies developmental and training needs to ensure that appropriate training is made available to staff to ensure that individuals are able to undertake their present role effectively and that they have the opportunity to develop to meet their and the Council's needs.
- 3.26 In May 2015 Warwick District Council elected a new Council. The Council put in place a Member induction programme, with training sessions around the internal operation of the council and information about the council's services. All Members received Code of Conduct and IT training. The Planning and Licencing Committees held induction training for their members. The Planning Committee holds regular workshops and Full Council workshops have been arranged for all Members, when required.
- 3.27 The Council continues to ensure it is open and accessible to the community. In 2016/17 it has:
- Published further information on the transparency section of the website to meet new guidelines.
  - Enhanced its consultation activity concerning budget setting. For example, a meeting was held with local business representatives to discuss the Council's budget proposals, along with other matters of mutual interest (primarily business rates revaluation).

- 3.28 All Committee meetings are open to the public except where personal or confidential matters are discussed. All agendas and minutes are placed on-line, along with the Council's policies and strategies. These items are also available by directly contacting the Council. When identifying the priorities and objectives for the Strategic Plan the views of stakeholders and the wider community are sought through a number of consultation mechanisms, and are taken into account. The Strategic Plan is made available to all via the Council's website.
- 3.29 During 2016/17 the Council's Scrutiny Committees looked at various areas of Council decision-making and service delivery, including the introduction of charges for waste containers as well as action on letting boards. In addition, 'Task and Finish' groups were set up to review Houses in Multiple Occupation (HIMOs) and Car Parking Charges.
- 3.30 There are terms of reference and constitutions set up for key partnerships which ensure that all members of the partnership act lawfully throughout the decision-making process. Key partnerships include the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership and South Warwickshire Crime and Disorder Partnership. We also work closely with several other councils and operate shared services for Building Control, Business Rates, Corporate Fraud and Legal Services.

#### **4 REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS**

- 4.1 Warwick District Council is required under legislation 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, and also 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 (a Deputy Chief Executive) has responsibility for overseeing the implementation and monitoring the operation of the Code of Corporate Governance, maintaining and updating the Code in the light of latest guidance on best practice, considering any changes that may be necessary to maintain it and ensure its effectiveness in practice. All reports to Executive, 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 financial affairs. This includes responsibility for maintaining and reviewing the Code of Financial Practice to ensure they remain fit for purpose, and submitting any additions or changes necessary to the full Council for approval. The Section 151 Officer is also responsible for reporting, where appropriate, breaches of the Code of Financial Practice to the Executive and/or the Council. All reports to Executive, Committees and Council are seen by the Section 151 Officer to ensure compliance with financial requirements.

- 4.5 The Council's Internal Audit Service is required to provide annually an independent and objective opinion to the Authority on its risk management, governance and control environment. In regard to this, the Audit and Risk Manager's Annual Report and Opinion for 2016/17 concluded that, in overall terms, the areas audited were adequately managed and controlled.
- 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 the collation of assurances from all heads of services on the effectiveness of the internal control environment. A review of the service assurance statements, as they are called, concluded that, based on this self-assessment, effective controls were in place.
- 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. An internal assessment of the performance of Internal Audit and its conformance with the PSIAS has been undertaken and the findings of this review have been reported to Members for their consideration as part of the Audit and Risk Manager's Annual Report and Opinion. An essential element of this assessment is to ensure that the annual audit opinion issued by Internal Audit may be relied upon as a key source of evidence and assurance.
- 4.8 Grant Thornton was appointed as the Council's External Auditor from 1 September 2012 and is responsible for reviewing the Council's Statements of Accounts. In addition to reviewing the 2016/17 Statement of Accounts, Grant Thornton issued a formal opinion on the Council's arrangements for securing Value for Money, concluding that the Council had made appropriate arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.
- 4.9 The Council is required to appoint new auditors prior to the 2018/19 financial year, for which the Council has agreed to opt in to the Public Sector Audit Appointments arrangements. This means that rather than run the procurement exercise itself, which would be extremely time-consuming and therefore costly, it is utilising the resources and expertise of a body specially set up to assist local authorities appoint their external auditors.

## **5 GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

- 5.1 The following governance issues have been identified:
1. The need to ensure that lessons are learned corporately from the Electrical Maintenance Contract Procurement.
  2. The requirement to update the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance in the light of recently-revised CIPFA/SOLACE guidance.

**6 CERTIFICATION**

- 6.1 The governance framework has been in place at Warwick District Council for the year ended 31 March 2017 and up to the date of approval of the annual statement of accounts.
- 6.2 Action will be taken to address the governance matters that have been identified.

**Signed:**

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Andrew Mobbs  
Leader of the Council

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Chris Elliott  
Chief Executive

**Dated:**

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