

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

DATE	23 rd July 2020
REPORT OF	Director of Resources and Governance
SUBJECT	Draft Annual Governance Statement 2019/20
STATUS	Open

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

Good governance is fundamental to the effective delivery of the Council's services and achieving its strategic aims. Open and transparent decision making; financial and budgetary control; effective scrutiny arrangements; strategic risk management and effective partnership working all impact on the manner in which the Council runs its business for the benefit of local people.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is a requirement of the Accounts and Audit Regulations (2015) for the Council to annually produce, and contain within the statement of accounts, an Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The AGS lays out the Council's governance framework, how it obtains assurance that the governance framework is operating as intended, and (where applicable) those areas for further focus in 2020/21. In 2019/20 it also provides commentary on the effectiveness of the Council's response to Covid-19.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Audit and Governance Committee considers whether the draft AGS provides a sufficient level of assurance on the adequacy of the council's governance arrangements to allow the committee to fulfil its role.
2. That the Audit and Governance Committee approves the publishing of the draft AGS on the Council's website.

REASONS FOR DECISION

The production of the AGS is a statutory requirement. It is a responsibility of the Audit and Governance Committee as the body charged with governance to review it and recommend its adoption by the Council.

It is a requirement under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 for the draft Annual Governance Statement to be published on the Council's website alongside the draft accounts.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

1.1. Under Section 2 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations (2015), Councils must ensure that it has a sound system of internal control which:

- *“facilitates the effective exercise of its functions and the achievement of its aims and objectives;*
- *ensures that the financial and operational management of the authority is effective; and*
- *includes effective arrangements for the management of risk”.*

1.2. The regulations also state that the Council must:

- conduct a review at least once in a year of the effectiveness of its system of internal control;
- prepare an Annual Governance Statement;
- consider the findings of the review by Full Council or by a relevant committee;
- following the review approve an annual governance statement, prepared in accordance with proper practices in relation to internal control;
- a draft Annual Governance Statement is published at the same time as the publication of the draft accounts; and
- ensure that the statement is approved in advance of the approval of the statement of accounts.

1.3. As a result of Covid-19 the timetable for the production of the 2019/20 draft and audited statement of accounts, and therefore the accompanying final AGS, has been amended to 30 September 2020 and 30 November 2020 respectively at the latest. Due to the time lapse between the production of the draft and final AGS there may be a greater number of further adjustments than would normally be the case.

1.4. The AGS sets out the Council’s governance arrangements in place and considers their effectiveness. The Council’s governance arrangements are set out in its Code of Governance which was updated in December 2019 and subsequently approved by the Audit and Governance Committee in January 2020. The Code is based upon guidance provided by the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society for Local Government Chief Executives (SOLACE) “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government – a framework” (April 2016).

1.5. The Council’s Local Code of Corporate Governance is framed around seven core principles of good governance for the local government sector. All councils are expected to espouse the core principles and, most importantly, demonstrate evidence of their compliance.

1.6. The three lines of defence assurance model is central to the review of effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements as follows:

- First Line – (delivery/operational area).

Each Director is required to complete an annual self-assessment as to how assurances are sought to confirm that the services and functions they are responsible for comply with each of the seven principles.

- Second Line - (oversight of management activity and separate from those responsible for delivery).

A range of reports are produced annually or throughout the year from those responsible for the oversight of management activity which provide assurance on the operation of elements of the governance framework.

- Third line (independent oversight) - e.g. Internal Audit/ External Audit/ External Inspections.

1.7. The AGS also reflects how Covid-19 impacted on governance. In line with CIPFA guidance issued on 7 April 2020 the impact of Covid-19 was considered over four categories:

- Impact on business as usual in the delivery of services
- New areas of activity as part of the national response to coronavirus and any governance issues arising
- The funding and logistical consequences of delivering the local government response
- Assessment of the longer-term disruption and consequences arising from the coronavirus pandemic

1.8. The draft AGS 2019/20 is attached and shows that the Council has well-established governance arrangements that are monitored and reviewed on a regular basis. However, two areas for further focus (Children's Services and Covid-19) have been identified, as highlighted in section 8 of the AGS. This conclusion will be updated should any significant issues arise between that date and the completion of the external audit. When the committee receives the audited accounts, it will also receive the final version of the AGS, where it will be asked to recommend to the Leader and the Chief Executive to sign it on the Council's behalf.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Annual Governance Statement is a statutory requirement and there is potential reputational risk if it was not produced, or if it fails to properly reflect any relevant issues relating to the Council's governance arrangements. Any significant issues identified in the Annual Governance Statement should be reflected in the Council's risk registers.

3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Not applicable. The production of an Annual Governance Statement is a requirement of the Accounts and Audit regulations 2015.

4. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

There is inherent reputational risk related to those areas identified for focus in 2020/21. Monitoring arrangements have put in place to manage these risks. The draft AGS will be published on the Council's website.

5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

None specifically related to the production of the Annual Governance Statement.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council's approach the environment is included in the Council's Code of Governance, and is considered as part of the annual review of the Council's governance arrangements.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 As part of the supporting evidence to the Annual Governance Statement there is a requirement to assess the Council's financial management arrangements against the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government. No significant gaps requiring specific reporting in the annual governance statement have been identified.

7.2 It is important that governance issues are addressed as soon as practicable in order to avoid any significant financial liabilities.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The legal implications arising from the contents of this report are covered in its body.

9. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

The HR aspects are covered within the contents of the report.

10. WARD IMPLICATIONS

The report covers issues affecting the whole operation of the council and therefore is relevant to all wards.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Accounts and Audit Regulations (2015)
Delivering Corporate Governance in Local Government- a framework (April 2016)
NELC Code of Governance (January 2020)
Annual Government Statement (2018/19))

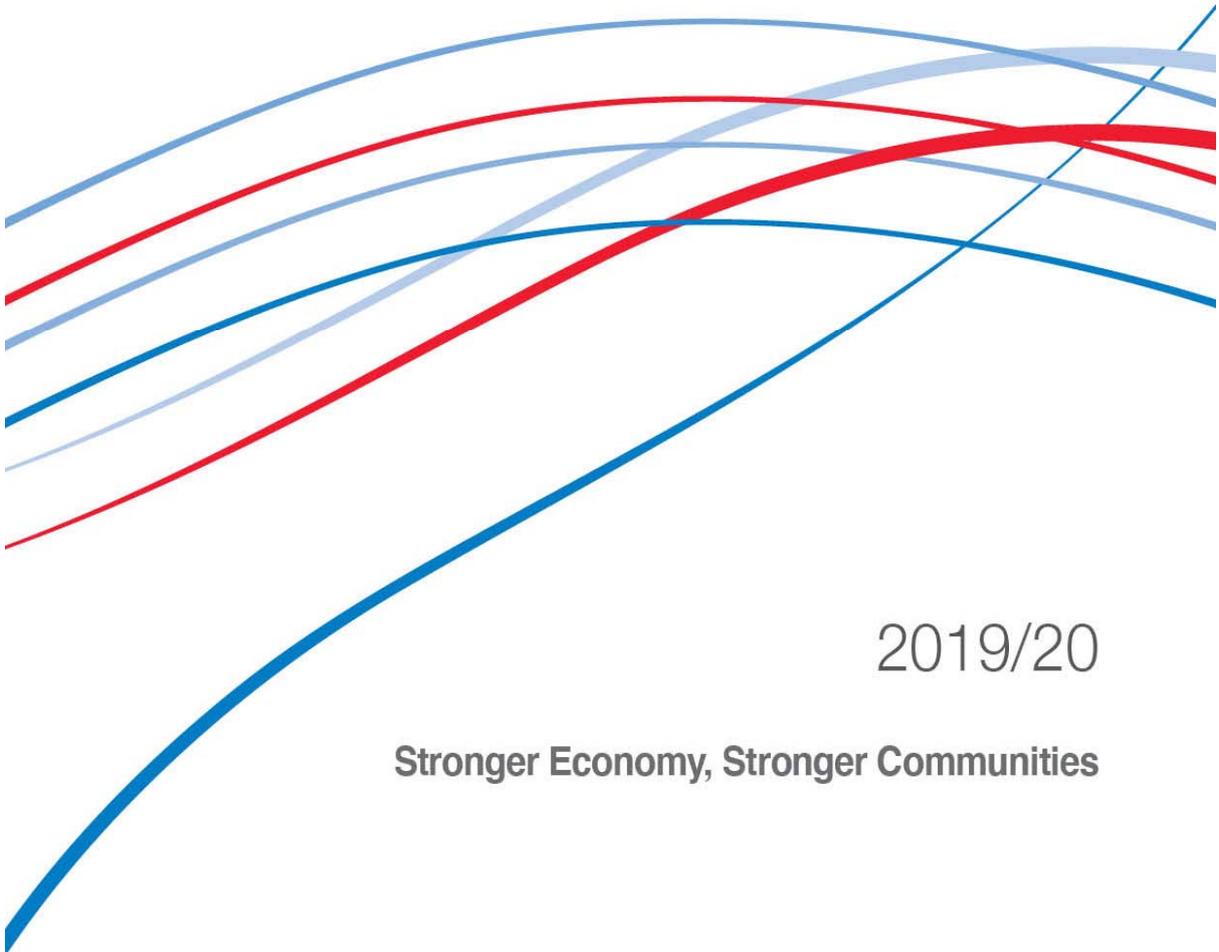
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North East Lincolnshire Council

Annual Governance Statement



2019/20

Stronger Economy, Stronger Communities

1. Introduction

North East Lincolnshire Council (the Council) is required by the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, regulation 10(1), to prepare and publish an Annual Governance Statement in order to report on the extent to which we comply with our Local Code of Corporate Governance. This Statement provides an overview of how the Council's governance arrangements operate, including how they are reviewed annually to ensure they remain effective. A summary of significant issues/challenges that the Council faces is also given. This provides transparency and gives assurance that the Council is committed to continuous improvement in the way in which it functions.

The AGS assesses governance in place during 2019/20 so much of the year was unaffected by coronavirus. However, Covid-19 impacted on governance during March 2020 and therefore the Council needs to ensure that the AGS is current at the time of publication, so it is essential that the AGS also reflects the impact on governance. This is considered in section 7 of this document.

2. Scope of Responsibility

The Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

The 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, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

3. The Purpose of the Governance Framework

The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values by which the authority is directed and controlled and those 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.

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 policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an on-going process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood and potential impact of those risks being realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The governance framework has been in place at North East Lincolnshire Council for the year ended 31 March 2020 and up to the date of approval of the Statement of Accounts.

4. The Governance Framework

The Council has defined its key strategic outcomes as all people:

- Enjoy and benefit from a strong economy
- Feel safe and are safe
- Enjoy good health and well being
- Benefit from sustainable communities
- Fulfil their potential through skills and learning



Good governance processes are critical in supporting the delivery of strategic outcomes. The Council operates to a Code of Corporate Governance, which forms part of the Constitution. It is based on the guidance provided by the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Government Chief Executives (SOLACE) “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government – a framework” (April 2016). It was subjected to its annual review in December 2019 to ensure that it reflected the Council’s current governance arrangements and the revisions made were approved by the Audit & Governance Committee in January 2020.

A copy of the code is on the attached link. [Local Code of Corporate Governance](#)

It is based on the following principles:

- A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law
- B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

- C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits
- D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
- E. Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
- F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
- G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability

5. Review of Effectiveness of the Governance Framework

The Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The Council's Corporate Governance Group, made up of the Council's key senior officers with governance role and chaired by the Director Resources and Governance, is responsible for coordinating this review.

The three lines of defence assurance model is central to the review of effectiveness as follows:

First Line – Management of the control environment at delivery/operational level

Each Director is annually required to complete an annual self-assessment as to how they seek assurance that their services/functions comply with each of the seven principles. This showed that the principles in the main are embedded in practice in all significant areas of the Council's operations. Although some gaps were identified some areas none were considered of significance to be reported in the AGS.

Second Line - (oversight of management activity and separate from those responsible for delivery)

A range of reports is produced annually or throughout the year from those responsible for the oversight of management activity which provide assurance on the operation of elements of the governance framework, including:

- **Annual Complaints report** – production delayed due to Covid19. To be included in the final version.
- **Annual Fraud Report 2019/20** – highlights the work that has been undertaken for the prevention and detection of fraud, corruption and financial misconduct. No major frauds reported.
- **Annual Scrutiny report** – production delayed due to Covid19. To be reported to Full Council on 30 July 2020. It provides a summary of the work undertaken by scrutiny in 2019-20 and outlines future work programmes.

- **Audit and Governance Committee Annual Report 2019/20** – the report confirms effectiveness of the Audit & Governance Committee and that it continues to comply with the Independence Standards.
- [Director of Public Health Annual Report 2019](#) – reported to Cabinet on 11 November 2019. The report is themed around the built and natural environment. Place based recommendations have been made for how to improve health and wellbeing outcomes, reduce health inequalities and build healthier place.
- **Information Governance and Security Annual Governance Report 2019/20** – nine data protection incidents were reported to the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) who determined in eight cases that no regulatory action was necessary. One incident that related to an allegation of unlawful obtaining of personal data against the Council has been allocated to the ICO’s Criminal Investment Team.
- **Risk Management Annual Report** – due to be presented to Audit and Governance Committee on 23 July 2020. Overall, the Council keeps its risks up to date however there are some areas where they are not consistently kept up to date.
- [Treasury Management Strategy Statement](#) - reviewed by Audit and Governance Committee 16 January 2020 and Cabinet 12 February 2020. The Statement conformed with Treasury Management regulations and no material breaches reported.
- [Virtual School Headteacher Annual Report](#) – reported to the Children & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel 26 September 2019. The Virtual School is the key education advocacy service for all Children Looked After (CLA) whether they are attending a school within North East Lincolnshire or for those placed out of area. The report provides statistics on CLA in mainstream education, attendance data and attainment. It was reported that Key Stages 1 and 2 were above CLA attainment.
- **CIPFA Code of Financial Management** - the Group Manager (Finance) against CIPFA’s Code of Financial Management, issued in October 2019, carried out a self-assessment. The conclusion of the self- assessment was that the Council is fully compliant with the Code. A small number of improvement areas were identified, and these have been incorporated into existing practice.
- **VFM report** – reported to the Audit and Governance Committee 23 July 2020 - no significant gaps in arrangements reported.
- **Assurance provided by the Health and Safety Manager** - no material issues were identified. Policies and procedures relating to occupational health and safety to ensure that they are fit for purpose in relation to the organisation and reflect any changes from a legal point of view.
- **Assurance provided by the Monitoring Officer in relation to legality issues** – no material issues were identified.
- **Assurance provided by the Head of People and Culture on human resources issues** - no material issues were identified.

During the year, some reports are received relating to the previous year’s data. These are listed below:

- [Adult Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report](#) – reported to the Union Board 12 November 2019. Provides an overview of the activity and analysis of complaints and representations during 2018/19. It also highlights service improvements implemented as a result of complaints and representations.
- [Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report](#) – reported to the Children & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel 26 September 2019. Focuses on the work of the IROs for Children Looked After in 2018/19. It provides a context to the work of IROs and summarises key issues emerging that are relevant to Children’s Services.
- [Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report](#) - reported to the Health and Adults Scrutiny Panel 22 January 2020. This sets out the activities and work undertaken by North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Adults Board and its members to deliver on the aims and objectives of its Strategic Plan. It also includes performance data including the number of concerns received and the number of Deprivation of Liberties authorisation requests received and processed.
- [Schools Exclusions Annual Report](#) - reported to Children & Life-Long Learning Scrutiny Panel. This reports the number of exclusions and managed moves in North East Lincolnshire.

Third line (independent oversight)

Head of Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion 2019/20 - Due to the impact of Covid-19 in delaying the completion of the work in relation the audit plan a draft Head of Audit Annual Report was issued in July 2020. Based on the work up to that point it concluded that the Council had a satisfactory control environment but identified some areas for improvement. Where appropriate some of these have been considered for inclusion and included in section eight of this Statement. A final Head of Internal Audit Annual Report will be produced on the completion of the outstanding work, and any additional area for improvement will be considered in the final AGS to be presented alongside the audited annual statement of accounts.

External Audit - Due to the impact of Covid-19, in line with national guidance the deadlines to produce the audited statement of accounts and the external auditors VFM opinion was pushed back to 30 November at the latest. The final Annual Governance Statement will take account of any issues arising from the audit.

External Inspection Agencies

The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted)

Ofsted inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people and those providing education and skills for learners. As was reported in the previous AGS a focused visit to the “front door” in March 2019 was carried out. A detailed improvement plan was developed by the Director of Children’s Services and approved by the DfE and Ofsted, which focused improvement across four priority areas.

A second visit was subsequently undertaken on 22 – 23 October in Children’s Services. It was reported that there continued to be significant weaknesses in the quality of services for children in need and those in need of help and protection. The

DfE identified a set of nine escalation measures and set a minimum target of achievement against each by the 31st March 2020. Through focused drive, the target for all escalation measures were met by the deadline set.

The Council's response to both visits is referred to in detail in Appendix 1 of the AGS, whilst section 8 shows the further action to be undertaken.

Care Quality Commission (CQC)

The CQC is the regulatory body responsible for the quality of health, and adult social care service in England and carry out reviews of local arrangements. The CQC advises, as good practice, that councils provide a Local Account. This demonstrates how the Council has safeguarded and maintained personal dignity, put people first and achieved value for money judged against the health and social care outcomes for the area. The Local Account was reported to the Union Board 12 November 2019.

There were no external inspections within Adult Social Care. However, CQC ratings of provision in the area are generally good when benchmarked with other councils in the area.

SEND Peer Review

A Peer review was undertaken in March 2020 which was constructive and provided the Council with a useful steer on improvements to make. These have been incorporated into the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) and form part of the action plan to be delivered in 2020. The Council is expecting a SEND Ofsted inspection this year, and this is likely to happen as soon as the inspection suspension is lifted.

Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO) Inspection

The IPCO carried out a telephone and desk-based inspection. The information provided demonstrated an appropriate level of compliance that removes, for the present, the requirement for a physical inspection.

Other Inspections

- PSN Code of Connection IT Health Check
- LGA Cyber Security Stocktake
- The NHS Data Security and Protection Toolkit assessment
- North East Lincolnshire Archives, managed through Lincs Inspire, are accredited through the National Archives

Ombudsman

An Ombudsman is appointed to independently investigate complaints that have not been resolved by the organisation complained about. During 2019/20, the Ombudsman upheld one complaint against the Council in relation to respite care provided and awarded a modest financial remedy.

6. Progress in addressing 2018/19 Significant Issues

The assessment also includes the monitoring of action plans in relation to areas of focus identified in 2018/19 update on the areas of focus and progress against them is set out at Appendix 1 to this Statement.

7. Response to Covid-19

In line with CIPFA guidance issued 7 April the impact of Covid-19 was considered over four categories:

- ***Impact on business as usual in the delivery of services***

Business continuity plans were reviewed and updated prior to the implementation of emergency arrangements. Business continuity arrangements at regional and national level continue, initially a high frequency, with flexibility as to that frequency being in place as the response and subsequent recovery arrangements continue.

The Council enacted its business continuity processes, identified its essential services, and prioritised the minimum level of resources required to provide them. In April 2020, the Council participated in a regional exercise to demonstrate how the Council had responded to Covid-19 in relation to the delivery of core services.

Prior to lockdown, the ICT strategy was moving the Council towards more agile technology and platforms. Within days of lockdown arrangements, the Council was able to ensure that the majority of the workforce were able to work from home, utilising digital tools such as Microsoft Teams, which has been an essential element in our ability to continue to respond quickly, stay in touch with the workforce, and ensure essential meetings could continue with relatively few issues. During this period, all employees and elected members have been able to work from home safely and securely.

In addition, in line with the business continuity planning arrangements, the Council implemented measures whereby only key or essential workers would need to work from an office or building location. The Council also implemented shielding arrangements for those employees at high risk. Workforce arrangements continue to be reviewed on a constant basis, and as guidance is updated, frequent communications and FAQ's are issued.

Working to an overall Communications Plan, communications materials were supplied through a variety of external and internal channels - including media releases/interaction with local and regional media, social media and staff bulletin updates. A specific electronic update for members was also produced via the Communications Department and Chief Executive on a bi-weekly or weekly basis. In addition, a targeted letter from the Leader of the Council, explaining health messages and activity being carried out to tackle the pandemic and including contact information for residents, was produced and delivered to every household in the borough. This work was done in conjunction with colleagues in the CCG to ensure health and well-being was at the forefront of the communications approach.

As part of the completion of the AGS, directors were asked to confirm whether there were any significant control failures relating to the delivery of essential services. None were reported.

- ***New areas of activity as part of the national response to coronavirus and any governance issues arising***

The Monitoring Officer receives daily update emails from the Local Resilience Forum (LRF). From this, he extracts guidance links and updates and circulates this to Leadership Team and Assistant Directors.

In addition, as discussed in the Constitution section, where appropriate the guidance was formally approved by Council through emergency powers.

In response of the pandemic new expectations were placed on the council as part of the national response, including:

- Support to those shielding
- Support to Care providers
- Administration of business support grants and new rate reliefs for certain business
- Additional council tax discounts to administer
- Supplier relief arrangements

The Council adapted systems and internal controls to mitigate risk of fraud for example spotlight system in relation to business grants and open book agreements relating to supplier relief. Also, data sharing agreements were implemented for the Shield Hub arrangements.

In compiling the AGS, each Director was asked to confirm whether there had been any significant issues about the implementation of legislation and guidance relating to Covid-19, as well as the provision of grants to the vulnerable residents and businesses. No issues were reported. During 2020/21 Internal Audit will be reviewing how guidance has been implemented when carrying out its audit assignments.

- ***The funding and logistical consequences of delivering the local government response***

- **Constitutional arrangements**

It was agreed that all Council meetings be cancelled until the end of April. In anticipation of emergency legislation being brought forward by Government to facilitate “remote” meetings, with agreement from group leaders on the way forward regarding the phased mobilisation of remote meetings, and in May some remote meetings were arranged, allowing Cabinet, Scrutiny and Planning Committee to meet. Agreement was also reached on the cancellation of the AGM of Council, the carry forward of all appointments as at last year’s AGM until May 2021, as well as agreement regarding the mayoralty.

An emergency decision making arrangements were implemented at the beginning of the mobilisation of the Council’s response. These were laid out in a report to Cabinet 1 May 2020. [Covid-19](#)

With the phased mobilisation of remote meetings and subject to any prospective relaxation of the Government's lockdown restrictions, the necessity for the operation of the emergency decision the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Leader and the Chief Executive, is keeping making arrangements under constant review.

In line with delegated authority, all decisions made as a result of the response to the emergency are done so in consultation with the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources. Portfolio Holder (PFH) briefings will continue to be held, and in almost every case a PFH is fully briefed before a decision is made formally.

Formal records of decisions are logged and monitored by the Monitoring Officer via a spreadsheet reflecting their progress through the system. Each decision is supported by an email thread showing "sign off" by the Scrutiny Chair, Portfolio Holder, Leader and Chief Executive.

Communities Scrutiny Panel have oversight of decisions made in relation to the emergency, including a list of emergency decisions. Communities Scrutiny Panel 4 June 2020 [COVID-19 Emergency Governance and Decisions](#)

- **Financial Implications**

Local authorities are required by MHCLG to provide monthly updates in relation to the forecast financial impact of the response to Covid-19. The Council has produced returns outlining forecasts in relation to income and costs, cash flow, and reserves. As this moves forward the Council will be able to provide more robust estimates of costs and revenue losses. The Council also produces a monthly summary for Cabinet Members. Whilst the impact is inevitably being felt in year, there are longer term considerations in relation to income, predominantly concerning the Council's tax base, which currently makes up 80% of our income base – any permanent impairment to the tax base has much longer term implications for financial sustainability.

In terms of responding to the financial impact, arrangements have been put in place to prepare a plan for recovery, from a range of perspectives, with financial sustainability and local economic recovery being key strands of the action plan. A Cabinet report covers the main areas of focus, timelines and potential impact on our current business plan/MTFP.

The Council is reviewing and revising its finance strategy and capital investment strategy to ensure they are aligned to revised financial plans. It is monitoring the financial impact of Covid19, splitting the impact into three main areas – costs associated with the response to the emergency, impact on business/commissioning plans and priorities, including delays to delivery of plans and savings targets, and impact on income, fees and charges. Financial assurance arrangements are in place, and are taking place more frequently across SMT's, with Leadership Team being the forum for finance and commissioning assurance arrangements moving forward.

- ***Assessment of the longer-term disruption and consequences arising from the coronavirus pandemic***

The Council has developed a strategic recovery plan to manage the phased return of service delivery in line with responding to the ongoing risks around Covid-19. The development of the strategic recovery plan has been driven by the Recovery Task Group (RTG), chaired by the Chief Operating Officer, with workstream leads (Director or Assistant Director) appointed to manage delivery across the six strategic areas of focus:

- Local economy and business support
- Adult social care and protection of the vulnerable
- Children, families and schools
- Environment and regulatory
- Community resilience and engagement
- Financial resilience, reform and renewal

A detailed risk assessment in respect of Covid-19 has been undertaken, and a strategic risk is recorded on the risk register, with an operational risk recorded against each of the workstream areas. Actions to control and mitigate the risks are being driven through delivery of the detailed recovery plans within each workstream.

The strategic recovery plan will be presented to Cabinet on 8th July 2020 and Communities Scrutiny Panel on 23rd July 2020.

8. Governance Challenges for 20/21

The review of governance arrangements has identified two main areas where the Council will need to focus its efforts during 2020/21 to address changing circumstances and challenges identified. These are detailed below:

Children's Services

The Council has now received formal notification from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families that they are satisfied that sufficient progress has been made and that the Council can now focus on embedding quality of practice across Children's Social Care. The Improvement Board will remain in place for the next six months to ensure that the improvements made have been sustained.

A transformation framework will be launched which establishes the strategic ambition and direction of children's services, aligning to the Council outcomes framework. The Transformation Plan supports improved quality and long-term sustainability in outcomes and cost.

Ofsted and the DfE will maintain scrutiny on children's social care despite the lifting of the escalation measures. Reviews/inspections from both bodies are anticipated before the end of 2020. Therefore, the independently chaired monthly improvement board remains in place, underpinned by a re-framed improvement plan which sits within the wider children's services transformation framework. The improvement plan has three priority areas: positive performance; high quality practice and motivated workforce. Reporting on progress to achieve the priority outcomes will commence in July 2020.

Covid-19

The Recovery Task Group (RTG) will receive the first report on progress of delivery of the plan on 25th June 2020 (due to the critical need for recovery to commence, the plan is being delivered prior to final sign off at Cabinet). The RTG will continue to receive weekly reports to maintain pace in the delivery of the plan and to identify risks or issues which threaten delivery of the plan as soon as they emerge. The RTG will report to the Leadership Team fortnightly, and a progress report will be submitted to monthly Cabinet and quarterly Communities Scrutiny Panel to provide assurance on the delivery of the plan.



9. Conclusion

The Council has assurance that its governance arrangements and system of control are robust and reflect the principals of the Code of Corporate Governance. Over the coming year the Council will take steps to further, strengthen its governance arrangements as highlighted in section 8.

There is a robust Recovery Plan in place for Covid-19 together with associated governance arrangements.

Signed:

Leader of the Council

Head of Paid Service

Appendix 1 - Update on issues identified in the 2020/21 AGS

Issue raised in the 2019/20 AGS	Position as at 31 May 2020
Partnership Governance	<p>The governance arrangements in relation to “the Union” between the Council and CCG continue to develop. On 12 November 2019, the Union Board approved a draft Union Business Plan. This sets out the Aims and Vision of the Union, the key principles of the Union Operating Model, the Union priorities, and its performance framework.</p> <p>As part of the 2018/19 scrutiny programme, Elected Members requested that the Director of Economy and Growth undertake a comprehensive review of the Regeneration Partnership. On 5th June 2019, Cabinet approved for the Director of Economy and Growth to progress an implementation plan and to report on performance on a regular basis. On 6th November 2019, an update report was presented to Cabinet. An implementation programme has been created to take forward the recommendations from the review and work on the improvement plan has led to changes to the Partnership strategic oversight and decision-making arrangements, whilst progress has been made to develop the recommendations into actions and formulate new ways of working with the Partnership.</p> <p>During 2019, the council’s partnership protocol was updated and approved by the Audit and Governance Committee on 16 January 2020.</p> <p>Partnership governance will be considered as part of the development and review of the Covid-19 Recovery Plan referred to sections 7 and 8.</p>
Housing Strategy	<p>The Strategic Housing Action Plan 2019/21, which was approved by Cabinet on 6 November 2019, is currently being implemented and embedded into working practices. This action plan provides clarity around the key housing challenges, what the Council want to achieve and how best to do this. The action plan sets out four key interdependent themes of Creating New Homes, Strengthening Places, Working Together and Improving Health supported by the Council’s housing objectives.</p> <p>The delivery of the Strategic Housing Action Plan plays a key role in building a Stronger Economy and Stronger Communities. The Plan supports economic regeneration and community cohesion in neighbourhoods, attracting new residents to the area and move towards helping everyone to lead independent, healthy and active lives.</p> <p>As part of the overarching housing strategy, a specific Empty Homes and Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy have been devised to underpin the Councils aspirations for the borough.</p>

	<p>A follow –up carried out by Internal Audit in 2020/21 was able to provide satisfactory assurance around the governance arrangements for monitoring the delivery of the action plan subject to some improvements.</p>
<p>Children’s Services</p>	<p>The Council’s Children Social Care provision received two monitoring visits in 2019 as part of the Ofsted Inspection Process. The first visit in March 2019, where three priority actions were identified and then a further monitoring visit in October 2019. During this visit, Ofsted identified five further priority actions that needed completing. They also felt insufficient progress had been made against two of the three identified in March. In conclusion, they reported that insufficient progress had been made overall, which in turn resulted in the DfE issuing a formal Improvement Notice to the Council on 18th December 2019.</p> <p>Work has been undertaken to address the issues overseen by an Improvement Board independently chaired by a DfE representative. A detailed improvement plan was developed by the Director of Children’s Services and approved by the DfE and Ofsted, which focused improvement across four priority areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levels of risk for children identified & managed effectively • Improved decision making & management oversight • Improved accuracy in performance data & reporting • Improve the input and quality of information entered onto the system <p>The DfE identified a set of nine escalation measures and set a minimum target of achievement against each by the 31st March 2020. Through focused drive, the target for all escalation measures were met by the deadline set:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An extensive training programme has been rolled out to all social workers and managers • Data quality within the children’s case file system has been significantly improved, providing reliable and timely data through new technology to speed assist the speed in which performance data is available for analysis and action. • A risk stratification tool was developed and launched to determine priority order for visiting the highest risk cases and 1457 children were assessed • Case management and management oversight have been substantially strengthened through improved reporting structures. <p>The following are examples of the impact achieved as a result of the continual improvement drive:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit timeliness for children subject to children protection plan improved to 90% which exceeds the performance of comparator groups. • Initial Child Protection Conference timeliness improved to 86% which exceeded the target of statistical neighbour average timeliness of 67.8%. • Social worker caseloads reduced to an average of 20, below the target set of 25. • Supervision timeliness improved to 75%. <p>The DfE have confirmed in May 2020 that significant progress has been made and that the Escalation Measures have now been met. These will now be removed. The Improvement Board will continue for the next 6 months as the LA shows a trajectory of improvement overall.</p>
Capital Programme	<p>A Framework has been introduced in 2019/20. This is a Business Case Development Gateway Process for both revenue, external and capital funding. The well-established capital governance framework was extended to cover all aspects of investment including non-treasury. All investment decisions are supported by a Business Case Service Statement.</p> <p>Investing in the growth agenda and supporting the economic and efficient delivery of core services is critical to the delivery of the capital investment strategy. Increasingly, the Council is taking a more commercial approach and investments are anticipated to contribute to the Council's strategic objective of enabling a strong and sustainable local economy. The cleaner and greener agenda remains a key Council priority, alongside continued support to the renewables sector and the area's overall carbon footprint.</p> <p>As a result of the 18/19 programme experiencing some slippage a full re-profiling exercise was undertaken at the beginning of 2019/20 that has seen adjustments in the programme to ensure a more realistic position. Throughout 2019/20 there has been quarterly review and challenge sessions with budget holders to understand levels of spend, considering anticipated lead times and decision-making processes and a regular re-profiling of the programme ensures it reflects the latest planned delivery patterns.</p> <p>The effectiveness of the changes is closely monitored and reported via quarterly finance and resources reports to Cabinet.</p>