

Council Report

Audit Committee Meeting – 24th November 2020.

Title

Annual Governance Statement 2019/20.

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No.

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Judith Badger, Strategic Director, Finance and Customer Services.

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

All wards.

Report Summary

On the 18th August 2020 the Audit Committee reviewed the Council's draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for the 2019/20 financial year. The draft AGS was published alongside the Council's financial statements on 31st July 2020. This report briefly reminds the Committee of the process that was followed to construct the AGS and provides an update on changes made to the draft AGS to produce this final version. The full AGS is attached to this report as Appendix A.

Recommendations

The Audit Committee is asked to

- Agree the final 2019/20 Annual Governance Statement
- Note that following the Audit Committee's approval of the AGS, the Leader and Chief Executive will be asked to sign the statement to confirm the Council's approval of it.

List of Appendices Included

Annual Governance Statement 2019/20.

Background Papers

"Delivering Good Governance in Local Government", published by CIPFA (the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) and SOLACE (the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives) in April 2016.

Audit Committee Report 27th November 2018 "Code of Corporate Governance"

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel
No.

Council Approval Required
No.

Exempt from the Press and Public
No.

Annual Governance Statement 2019/20

1. Background

- 1.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations require the Council to produce an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) alongside its Statement of Accounts in each financial year. The AGS is a statutory document which explains the processes and procedures in place to enable the Council to carry out its functions effectively. Local Authorities are required to prepare an AGS in order to report publicly on the extent to which they comply with their own Local Code of Governance. The draft 2019/20 AGS was published on 31 July 2020 and the final will be published by 31st November 2020.
- 1.2 The committee will recall that a process to gather assurances and evidence to support the AGS was led by the Corporate Governance Group, chaired by the Strategic Director Finance and Customer Services. The group included the Head of Internal Audit and the Corporate Risk Manager.
- 1.3 The assurance and evidence process produced a strong evidence base and enabled the Council to have confidence in the statements that it is making in the AGS.
- 1.4 Although the AGS relates to 2019/20, it has to be up to date at the time of publication and must include any planned changes in the coming year. As a result, a small number of updates to the draft AGS have been included to produce the final AGS. These updates are shown as tracked changes in the final AGS attached at Appendix A, for ease of review.

2. Process to construct the 2019/20 AGS

- 2.1 In constructing the AGS for 2019/20, the Council has assembled sufficient evidence to support the statements that it has made. To achieve this, each Strategic Director was asked to oversee a self-assessment of governance in their Directorate. This comprised the completion of a self-assessment form based on the Principles and Sub-principles in the Code of Corporate Governance by each Assistant Director as well as a review and update of the detailed issues raised in the 2018/19 AGS. Each Strategic Director was also required to sign a Statement of Assurance which was based on the information arising from their review of current and previous governance issues.
- 2.2 Each Directorate returned the required Statement of Assurance and supporting documents and the Corporate Governance Group has reviewed the evidence contained in them. Additionally, the group has considered which issues are of sufficient significance to require reporting in the AGS. The group then produced the AGS itself, which was reviewed by the Strategic Director Finance and Customer Services, and the Chief Executive.
- 2.3 The AGS outlines the governance arrangements in place throughout the year and how their effectiveness was monitored. The AGS recognises the improvements made in the Council's performance throughout the financial year but also highlights a number of areas for further developments in 2020/21.
- 2.4 Covid-19 has had a significant impact at the end of 2019/20 and into 2020/21. This is reflected within the AGS, which includes actions taken in response to the pandemic and lockdown. These actions have been updated where necessary since the publication of the draft AGS.

- 2.5 The AGS outlines the governance arrangements in place throughout the year and how their effectiveness was monitored.
- 2.6 The Committee are invited to comment on any aspect of the Annual Governance Statement attached to this report at Appendix A.
- 2.7 The AGS will be published by 30th November, taking account of any further comments made by the Audit Committee.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 This paper considers the final AGS for 2019/20. As a result, no specific options have been considered.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 All Strategic Directors have been asked for their input into the AGS process through the submission of signed Statements of Assurance.
- 4.2 The final AGS has been reviewed by the Strategic Director Finance and Customer Services and the Chief Executive.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 The Audit Committee is asked to receive this report at its November 2020 meeting.
- 5.2 The Corporate Governance Group will ensure that the final AGS is published by 30th November 2020.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications other than the requirement to publish the AGS alongside the Council's Annual Finance Statements. There are no procurement issues.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report, although it is a statutory requirement for an AGS to be published alongside the Council's Financial Statements. This report endeavours to set out how the Council intends to comply with that requirement.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no direct Human Resources implications arising from this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 Any implications for the Children and Young People's Service and Adults Services are set out in the AGS attached at appendix A.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 There are no direct Equalities and Human Rights Implications arising from this report.

11. Implications for Partners

11.1 There are no direct implications for our Partners in this report. The AGS has been constructed following consultation with all Directorates. Individual directorates are responsible for implementing action to respond to weaknesses identified in the AGS

12. Risks and Mitigation

12.1 The AGS is expected to be completed each year to sit alongside the Financial Statements. The risk of failing to produce an AGS has been considered and, although this is a remote risk resources are in place to ensure that a complete and accurate AGS is delivered on time.

13. Accountable Officer(s)

Judith Badger (*Strategic Director of Finance and Customer Services*)