



CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 26 MAY 2017

**JOINT REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE
RESOURCES AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2016/17

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to:
 - (a) Outline the background and approach taken to produce the County Council's 2016/17 Annual Governance Statement (AGS);
 - (b) Present the draft AGS for comment by the Committee prior to sign off by the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council.

Background

2. Regulations 6 (1)(a) and (b) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require each English local authority to conduct a review, at least once a year, of the effectiveness of its system of internal control and approve an annual governance statement, prepared in accordance with proper practices in relation to internal control.
3. 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework' (the Framework), originally published by CIPFA in association with Solace in 2007, sets the standard for local authority governance in the UK. CIPFA and Solace reviewed the Framework in 2015 to ensure it remained 'fit for purpose' and published a revised edition in spring 2016. The preparation and publication of an AGS in accordance with the Framework fulfils the statutory requirement. The Framework must be applied to the AGS prepared for the financial year 2016/17 onwards.
4. The AGS is an important requirement which enhances public reporting of governance matters. In essence, it is an accountability statement from each local government body to stakeholders on how well it has delivered on governance over the course of the previous year.
5. The AGS encompasses the governance systems applied in both the Authority and any significant group entities during the financial year being reported.

6. To ensure that the AGS reasonably reflects the Committee's knowledge and experience of the Council's governance and control framework and that the conclusions and future challenges are appropriate, CIPFA guidance requires high level input from the Committee into the AGS. The draft 2016/17 AGS is attached as Appendix 1 and any comments by the Committee will be duly considered and incorporated as appropriate.
7. The draft statement has already been considered by a senior management group comprising the Director of Law & Governance, the Director of Finance, the Head of Democratic Services, the Assistant Chief Executive, and the Head of Assurance Services.

Approach

8. The review of the effectiveness of the County Council's system of internal control and overall corporate governance arrangements requires the sources of assurance, which the Council relies on, to be brought together and reviewed, from both a departmental and corporate view.
9. The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) allows the Head of Internal Audit Service (the Head of Assurance Services) to assist management in drafting the AGS. The process followed as explained below, has not changed significantly from the previous year.
10. The Framework requires local authorities to review their arrangements against their Local Code of Corporate Governance (essentially refers the governance structure in place). The Council's Local Code of Governance has been revised and the first iteration appears as another item on this Committee's agenda. Development of the Local Code of Corporate Governance will continue throughout 2017-18.
11. To ensure the AGS represents an accurate picture of the governance arrangements for the whole Council, each Director was required to complete a 'self-assessment' designed to provide details of the measures in place (systems, process, documents etc.) within their departments during the financial year 2016/17, to ensure conformance (or otherwise) to the Framework. The self-assessment also allowed for the recognition and recording of areas where developments are required.
12. The departmental self-assessments required a corresponding score to be given reflecting the department's positions regarding practice, standards and quality. This is a gauge of effectiveness. The application of a more quantitative approach to assessing compliance against the principles contained in the Framework allows the Committee and public at large to obtain necessary assurance that the Council operates within an adequate internal control environment, thus complying with the seven core principles and best practice.

13. A number of Corporate Assurance Statements were also completed to gain an overall organisational perspective of processes in place as described by the seven core principles. These statements also allowed for the recognition and recording of areas where developments were required.
14. The completed statements were analysed along with various other sources of evidence to determine whether there are any significant governance issues that should be reported in the AGS. Other sources include:
 - a. Reports provided by internal and external audit and other assurance sources and the implications of these reports for the overall governance of the Council;
 - b. The Head of Internal Audit Service's annual opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Authority's control environment;
 - c. Evaluation of any negative media articles.

Outcome of the 2016/17 review of the Governance Framework

15. Guidance states that 'Significant Governance Issues' are those that:
 - a. Seriously prejudice or prevent achievement of a principal objective of the authority;
 - b. Have resulted in the need to seek additional funding to allow it to be resolved, or has resulted in the significant diversion of resources from another aspect of the business;
 - c. Have led to a material impact on the accounts;
 - d. The Corporate Governance Committee advises should be considered significant for this purpose;
 - e. The Head of Internal Audit Service reports on as significant in the annual opinion on the internal control environment;
 - f. Have attracted significant public interest or have seriously damaged the reputation of the organisation;
 - g. Have resulted in formal action being undertaken by the Chief Financial Officer and/or the Monitoring Officer.
16. During their review of the 2016/17 draft AGS; the senior management group (paragraph 7) determined that matters arising at the time of the implementation stage of the Help to Live at Home programme should be reported as a significant governance issue. This has been accepted.
17. The self-assessment process has confirmed that there is strong evidence of good governance. Nevertheless, further improvements to governance are planned in relation to the key challenges facing the Council in 2017/18 and throughout the timespan of the current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The senior management group charged with responsibility for producing the 2016/17 AGS has determined that progress on the development areas identified against each Principle in Section Four should be the responsibility of service managers. Similarly, the group determined that those areas listed in the Future Challenges Section will be subject to scrutiny through existing reporting channels.

18. The Code of Practice in Local Authority Accounting states that the AGS should relate to the governance system as it applied to the financial year for the accounts that it accompanies. However, significant events or developments relating to the governance system that occur between the Balance Sheet date and the date on which the Statement of Accounts is signed by the responsible financial officer should also be reported. Therefore, in the event of the above occurring, the AGS presented as Appendix 1 would change.

19. Approval and ownership of the AGS has been reflected at corporate level and the statement will be signed on behalf of the Council by the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council and published on the County Council's website.

Recommendations

1. The Committee is requested to:
 - a. Consider the draft AGS (Appendix 1) and indicate whether it is consistent with the Committee's own perspective on internal control within the Authority;
 - b. Note that the AGS, which may be subject to such changes as are required by the Code of Practice in Local Authority Accounting, has been prepared in accordance with best practice.

Resource Implications

2. None.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

3. None.

Background Papers

CIPFA/SOLACE: Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2016, 2012 and 2007)

2016/17 Departmental and Corporate self-assessments;

Circulation Under the Local Issues Alert procedure

None

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List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft Annual Governance Statement 2016/17

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