



TO: Audit & Governance Committee

FROM: Head of Audit & Assurance

DATE: 28 November 2023

PORTFOLIOS AFFECTED: All

WARDS AFFECTED: All

TITLE OF REPORT: Annual Governance Statement (AGS) – Progress of the 2022/23 Actions and 2023/24 Approach/Timetable

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. To inform Members on progress of the actions taken to address the significant governance issues identified in the 2022/23 AGS and the planned approach and timetable for producing the 2023/24 Statement.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. The Committee is asked to:
- review the progress made to the end of September to address the significant actions identified in the 2022/23 AGS; and
 - note the approach/timetable for producing the 2023/24 AGS.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. The Accounts & Audit Regulations require the Council to publish an AGS on an annual basis in accordance with proper practice. The Audit & Governance Committee is also required to review and provide independent assurance on the Council's governance framework.

4. RATIONALE

- 4.1. The AGS is a product of the Council's own review of its framework of governance. This framework comprises the policies, systems and processes, the culture and values, by which the organisation is directed and controlled, and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. The framework itself is based on guidance issued by CIPFA/SOLACE. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and delivery of agreed outcomes and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

5. KEY ISSUES

- 5.1. The AGS is a statutory document that must be published each year to accompany the Council's Annual Statement of Accounts. It outlines the arrangements that are in place to direct and control the Council's activities (the governance framework). It also includes an annual assessment of the effectiveness of the governance framework. Any significant governance issues identified must be reported, along

with an explanation of actions taken in the year to address the significant governance issues identified in the previous year's statement.

Actions from the 2022/23 AGS

The following issues were noted in the 2022/23 AGS:

- Long term financial sustainability of the Council;
- Children's & Education and Adults Inspection Readiness;
- Completion and Sign-off of Financial Statements by External Audit; and
- Corporate and Departmental Performance Management System.

Appendix 1 provides details of the progress made to 30 September for each of the above areas. This shows that appropriate steps are being taken by senior officers and managers in respect of the issues identified and work is in progress. However, the commentary notes that there are continuing demands leading to budget pressures and challenges that are being monitored and managed by the relevant management teams.

Approach for the 2023/24 AGS

The MAF process provides ongoing assurance on the effectiveness of the Council's governance framework. Each director provides an update with regard to their departmental/operational plan priorities through their half-yearly "Directors Exception/Dashboard Report and Assurance Statement". These include confirmation of the effective operation of sound systems of internal controls, risk management and governance arrangements within their department. These reports, combined with the Audit & Assurance review of the returns, provide appropriate challenge to the process, with significant "red" issues identified reported to the Corporate Leadership Team and Audit & Governance Committee for consideration.

There is a year-end process (co-ordinated by Audit & Assurance), which provides further assurance on the Council's governance framework. This includes the receipt of signed annual assurance statements from Strategic Directors for their areas of responsibility. This statement requires Directors to provide an assessment of their Departmental governance arrangements and systems of internal control, with an action plan for any areas of weakness identified. The year-end process also involves the collection and assessment of evidence to determine the Council's compliance with the core principles of good governance to support the AGS. This evidence includes examples of systems, processes, documentation and other evidence (including self-assessment tools and sources of further guidance) as recommended in the CIPFA/SOLACE publication "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Guidance Note for English Authorities 2016 edition".

Proposed Timetable for 2023/24 AGS Completion and Related Processes

Deadline	Action
11 March 2024	Circulation of Strategic Director annual statement of assurance templates.
12 April 2024	Completion and return of Year-end MAF Directors Exception/Dashboard reports.
26 April	Receipt of signed Strategic Director and Director, Chief Executives

2024	annual statements of assurance. Receipt and collation of annual governance core principle evidence.
28 May 2024	Year-end MAF significant “red” issues reported to Corporate Leadership Team.
29 May 2024	2023/24 AGS evidence and assurance statements considered by Statutory Governance Officers Group (SGOG).
7 June 2024	Production and agreement of final draft 2023/24 AGS by SGOG for consideration by Corporate Leadership Team.
27 June 2024	Year-end MAF significant “red” issues reported to Audit & Governance Committee. Approval of AGS by Audit & Governance Committee.
28 June 2024	AGS signed by Chief Executive and Leader of the Council.
30 July 2024	2023/24 AGS published.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Code of Corporate Governance sets out the core principles for good governance. These guide the Council’s policy making.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising from the AGS process.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council’s preparation and publication of an annual AGS, that accords with the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework, is necessary to meet the statutory responsibility (set out in Regulation 6 (2) of the Accounts & Audit Regulations 2015) This responsibility requires that an AGS is prepared in accordance with proper practices and accompanies the statement of accounts.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct resource implications arising from the AGS process.

10. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATION

There are no equality or health implications arising from the AGS process.

11. CONSULTATIONS

Strategic Directors of Adults & Health, Children’s & Education and Finance & Resources and Director, Chief Executives.

12. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council’s Code of Corporate Governance.

Contact Officer: Colin Ferguson, Head of Audit & Assurance – Ext: 5326
Date: 17 November 2023
Background Papers: 2022/23 AGS approved by Audit & Governance Committee
on 28 July 2023.