

To: Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee
From: Sue Grace
Ref: Annual Governance Statement - 2024/25
Date: 22/04/2025
cc: Sue Norman, Mairead Claydon

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ASSURANCE STATEMENT

The Council's Code of Corporate Governance illustrates how the Council is governed as a corporate body. On an annual basis the Council is required to prepare an Annual Governance Statement, which reports the extent to which the Council has complied with the Code of Corporate Governance for the financial year in question, as part of its Annual Financial Statement.

The Executive Director Assurance Statement is a key element of evidence to illustrate the degree of compliance with the Code of Governance.

ASSURANCE STATEMENT

I confirm the following points to the Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee:

- I understand the requirements of my job as set out in my contract of employment and my job description.
- I have made a Declaration of Private Interests as required by the Code of Conduct for any paid or unpaid private work or consultancy, or any potential conflict of interests relating to my work at the Council.
- I am aware of the principal statutory obligations and key priorities of the Council which impact on the services for which I am responsible and have actively communicated these to staff within my Directorate. I have made an assessment of the significant risks to the successful discharge of the Council's key outcomes and my service outcomes and have identified the appropriate controls to cost effectively mitigate these risks.
- I acknowledge that one of my managerial tasks is to develop, maintain and operate effective control systems to manage risk in all areas for which I have responsibility. I

confirm that I understand what this involves and that I have the necessary authority to establish and operate such controls effectively.

I have obtained assurance from my service directors on the key elements of risk and control systems for which I am responsible and I am satisfied that they:

- have met their responsibilities to identify and manage areas of high risk.
- have ensured control systems are operating effectively having taken action to address control weaknesses.
- are empowered to operate such control procedures.
- are aware of their responsibility to report upwards any unresolved matters of concern about the management of risk and to deal with any risk matters reported to them in an expeditious manner.
- have made Declarations of Private Interests as required by the Code of Conduct for any paid or unpaid private work or consultancy, or any potential conflict of interests relating to their work at the Council.
- are familiar with the Council's policy on whistleblowing which enables them to bypass intermediate levels of management without fear of victimisation, and
- have up to date business continuity plans in place for all the services they are responsible for.

I confirm that all significant internal control matters brought to my attention by staff, Internal Audit and Risk Management, External Audit or external regulators have been or are being properly dealt with.

Throughout the financial year 2024/25 I consider that the risks and internal controls for which I am responsible have been sufficiently addressed in order to provide reasonable assurance of effective financial and operational control, compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance and with other laws and regulations. To the best of my knowledge, these arrangements have been complied with in all material respects throughout the period.

I am not aware of any significant weaknesses in internal control or non-compliance with Council policies or procedures, including any relating from any change in business practice in my area of responsibility, or other irregularities in accounting practice which should be brought to your attention.

I confirm that any future plans will be assessed for their risks and internal control implications and that sufficient control will be put in place before such plans are implemented.

Any exceptions to the above are set out below:

N/A

I detail below any significant governance issues¹ I am aware of, and the action being undertaken to address these:

N/A

In support of the annual assessment of the Council's compliance with its Code of Corporate Governance, I detail below any reflections and comments on the Council's current governance arrangements, against the seven characteristics of governance within the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny's [Governance Risk & Resilience Framework](#):

- 1. Extent of recognition of individual and collective responsibility for good governance.**
- 2. Awareness of political dynamics.**
- 3. How the Council looks to the future to set its decision-making priorities.**
- 4. Officer and Councillor roles.**
- 5. How the Council's real situation compares to its sense of itself.**
- 6. Quality of local (external) relationships.**
- 7. The state of member oversight through scrutiny and audit committees.**

I also detail any actions which have been completed in 2024/25 or which are planned for 2025/26 to strengthen the Council's systems of governance against the seven characteristics noted above.

1. In support of improved governance on 31 October 2024 the Strategy, Resources and Performance committee approved a new Performance Management Framework for the council. This is designed to strengthen the council's ability to manage its performance in relation to its finances and how it manages risk. Since this meeting all the Policy and Service committees have reviewed their strategic and tactical KPIs. In June 2025 the Strategy, Resources and Performance committee will receive its first annual performance report for 2024/25, which will be set out in this revised format. In 2025/26 all reporting will be done against the new framework.

3. To help the council look to the future at the same meeting, 31 October 2024, the Strategy, Resources and Performance committee approved the Our Future Council strategy. This strategy sets out how the organisation will manage change in a consistent

¹ N.B. Significant governance issues are defined as those which:

- Seriously prejudice or prevent achievement of a principal objective of the authority;
- Have resulted in the need to seek additional funding to allow it to be resolved, or has resulted in significant diversion of resources from another aspect of the business;
- Have led to a material impact on the accounts;
- The Audit Committee advises should be considered significant for this purpose;
- The Head of Internal Audit reports on as significant in the annual opinion on the internal control environment;
- Have attracted significant public interest or have seriously damaged the reputation of the organisation;
- Have resulted in formal action being undertaken by the Chief Financial Officer and / or the Monitoring Officer

and coherent way both across the council, through the identification of 5 cross-cutting themes for change, as well as within Directorates. The strategy sets out a clear approach to portfolio, programme and project management including the strengthening of officer-led governance with upward reporting to a Change Board chaired by the Chief Executive. With the announcement of Local Government Reorganisation this strategy has been 'stress-tested' against approaches other councils have used when moving from two-tier to unitary models of local government. The 5 cross-cutting themes have stood up well under this review with the addition of further themes in areas such as finance and governance. Our Future Council will support the reporting of performance across portfolios and programmes, linking to the Performance Management Framework described above.

6. To support the quality of our external relationships our Consultation and Engagement Strategy has also been approved by Strategy, Resources and Performance, 31 October 2024. This review was designed to improve the clarity of the strategy, ensure our legal obligations were clear and well defined and to reflect the council's updated practices and recent organisational change. In addition to this the Policy and Insight service have supported colleagues' council-wide to review their strategic, external partnerships. Providing guidance on the definition of a partnership; ensuring appropriate terms of reference, effective governance and clarity around decision-making; and supporting all this through the development of a self-assessment tool to facilitate judgements around the effectiveness of these partnerships, identifying where they may need to be reviewed or revised and in some cases closed down.

7. Through the Business Planning process we have again ensured that Policy and Service committees are used to scrutinise the draft budget, as proposed by the Strategy, Resources and Performance committee at its meeting in December 2024. These scrutiny Policy and Service committees took place throughout January 2025 with the outcome of these meetings feeding into the re-consideration of the budget at the end of January 2025, ahead of the budget being recommended to full council in February 2025.

SIGNATURE: [signature redacted]

DATE: 22/04/2025