
Subject: 2023/24 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE ASSURANCE STATEMENT

Meeting and Date: Cabinet – 2 September 2024 (For Information)
Governance Committee – 26 September 2024

Report of: Louise May, Strategic Director (Corporate and Regulatory)

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Stacy Blair, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance, Climate Change and Environment

Decision Type: Non-Key

Classification: Unrestricted

Purpose of the report: To approve the Annual Governance Assurance Statement 2023/24

Recommendation:

- (1) Cabinet are asked to note that the Annual Governance Assurance Statement will be presented to the Governance Committee for approval.
- (2) Governance Committee are asked to approve the Annual Governance Assurance Statements and request that the Leader and the Chief Executive sign this statement on behalf of the Council.

1. Summary

1.1 Annually, the Council is required to conduct a review of the effectiveness of our system of internal control and also report on the extent to which we comply with our own Local Code of Corporate Governance. This must be conducted in accordance with the Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016 Edition and is reported as the Annual Governance Assurance Statement. Governance Committee are asked to accept the Annual Governance Assurance Statement for 2023/24, as recommended by the Corporate Management Team and request that the Leader and the Chief Executive sign this statement on behalf of the Council.

1.2 Usually, the statement of accounts is required to be approved by 31 July each year. However, challenges within the audit market across the sector since the Covid pandemic have created significant delays with audit completions. In February 2024, DHULC issued a consultation document to introduce backstop dates for the completion of historic audits to address the issue; the outcome of that consultation has yet to be published. The Annual Governance Assurance Statements have continued to be produced on an annual basis and are not impacted by the audit backlog issues. The 2023/24 Annual Governance Assurance Statement has been produced in line with the existing timescales.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, require that the Council conducts at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its system of internal control and also report on the extent to which we comply with our own Local Code of Corporate Governance. The Council's Annual Governance Assurance Statement is prepared to meet these

requirements and will be provided alongside the published Statement of Accounts in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

2.2 The statement is to be signed by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive, having paid due regard to any matters raised by the Strategic Director (Corporate and Regulatory) and the Monitoring Officer. In particular, they should have particular regard to the opinion of the Strategic Director (Corporate and Regulatory) and the Monitoring Officer on the level of assurance that the governance arrangements can provide and that the arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.

2.3 The Annual Governance Assurance Statement for 2023/24 is attached and has been agreed by the Corporate Management Team in August 2024. The statement has been prepared taking into account the following information:

- A detailed review of the Council's performance measured against the Core and Sub Principles as detailed in the Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016 Edition.
- The service review work performed by Internal Audit during the year.
- Internal Audit's review of Corporate Governance arrangements.
- Assurance Statements produced by individual Strategic Directors.
- The information gathered as a result of risk assessment and management.
- The annual reports of the Scrutiny and Governance Committees.

3. Identification of Options

3.1 Option 1: Agree the Annual Governance Assurance Statement including the key actions identified, for signature by the Leader and the Chief Executive and then for inclusion in the 2023/24 Accounts.

3.2 Option 2: Do not agree the Annual Governance Assurance Statement and require further analysis and clarification.

4. Evaluation of Options

4.1 Option 1 is the preferred option, as in preparing the Annual Governance Assurance Statement this fully meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework (2016 Edition) states:

"The preparation and publication of an Annual Governance Statement in accordance with Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2016) would fulfil the statutory requirements across the United Kingdom for a local authority to conduct a review at least once in each financial year of the effectiveness of its system of internal control and to include a statement reporting on the review with its Statement of Accounts. In England the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 stipulate that the Annual Governance Statement must be "prepared in accordance with proper practices in relation to accounts". Therefore a local authority in England shall provide this statement in accordance with Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2016)".

5. **Resource Implications**

None.

6. **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

There are no climate change or environmental implications arising from the Annual Governance Assurance Statement for 2023/24.

7. **Corporate Implications**

7.1 Comment from the Section 151 Officer: The Head of Finance & Investment has been consulted on this report and has no further comments to add. (HL)

7.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Solicitor to the Council has been consulted in the preparation of this report and has no further comments to make.

7.3 Comment from the Equalities Officer: This report seeking approval of the Annual Governance Assurance Statement 2023/24 does not specifically highlight any equality implications. In discharging their duties members are required to comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>.

8. **Appendices**

Appendix – Annual Governance Assurance Statement

9. **Background Papers**

Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015

CIPFA Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016 Edition

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