

Agenda Item No: 6
Report To: Audit Committee
Date of Meeting: 28th September 2017
Report Title: Annual Governance Statement – Progress on Remedying Exceptions
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Portfolio Holder Cllr. Shorter
Portfolio Holder for: Finance & IT



Summary: This report updates on the progress made towards the areas of review highlighted by the 2016-2017 Annual Governance Statement

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: N/A

Recommendations: **The Audit Committee is asked to:-**

- I. Note progress made towards the areas of review highlighted by the Annual Governance Statement as detailed in this report**

Policy Overview: Each year the council must produce and approve an Annual Governance Statement (AGS). AGS are designed to summarise for members and residents the council's approach to governance and show how the council fulfils the principles for good corporate governance in the public sector.

Financial Implications: None

Legal Implications None

Equalities Impact Assessment N/A

Other Material Implications: None

Exempt from Publication: NO

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Introduction and Background

1. Each year the council must produce and approve an Annual Governance Statement (AGS). AGS are designed to summarise for Members and residents the council's approach to governance and show how the council fulfils the principles for good corporate governance in the public sector. The AGS needs to draw conclusions, based on evidence throughout the past year, about the effectiveness of the council's arrangements.
2. The 2016-2017 Annual Governance Statement (AGS) was agreed by the June 2017 meeting of the Audit Committee and identified three areas for continued work and review -

Governance Area	Responsible Department	To be delivered by
Modern.Gov	Legal and Democratic Services	March 2018 (as set out in PID)
Peer Challenge	Directors / Management Team	January 2018
Compliance with the Transparency Code	Corporate Policy and Performance	March 2018

3. This report updates on the progress made towards these areas of review highlighted by the 2016-2017 Annual Governance Statement.

Purpose of this report

4. To update on the progress made towards the areas of review highlighted by the 2016-2017 Annual Governance Statement.

Progress to Date

Modern Gov

5. Staff in Member Services (and elsewhere) have been trained in use of the system. The intention is for Management Team to be using ModernGov for the running of their meetings by the end of 2017.
6. Concurrently, a cohort of all Cabinet Members and a small number of other early adopters will be trained and provided with devices by early 2018, ahead of user testing and a wider rollout across the organisation.

Peer Challenge

7. Peer challenge is a process by which a small team of councillors and officers from other local authorities are invited to look at the council's systems, processes and outcomes, and to make recommendations about what might be further reinforced or improved. Just over two-thirds of councils have commissioned a peer challenge.
8. Discussions will be taking place with the LGA to consider when a Peer Challenge could be programmed to take place at Ashford. The scope of any peer challenge will need to be defined in conjunction with Management Team and the Leader so that it reflects the council's direction of travel. Subject to the LGA's timetable and availability, such a review could take place during early 2018.

Compliance with the Transparency Code

9. Whilst compliance with the Code is an ongoing issue, the Annual Governance Statement was prepared in advance of a four-way best practice governance audit on transparency, conducted across the Mid-Kent Audit Partnership.
10. This audit is now complete, and confirmed that "*Ashford Borough Council is fully compliant with Principle G of the Good Governance Framework [covering the organisation's decision-making, service delivery and performance], and therefore no improvement is needed.*"
11. The audit also looked more widely at the council's publication of data against the Code, and whilst Ashford was found to demonstrate effective implementation against the Code (with no areas found to be 'not compliant', the review did highlight a small number of areas with partial compliance – either due to out of date information, or information being partially published.
12. Efforts are already underway to close these gaps, and further details will be published at the next quarterly update.

Conclusion and Next Steps

13. Work is still required in each of the three areas identified in the AGS in order to complete the areas of further governance work identified. This is to be expected – being the first quarterly update against the council's compliance (and still in advance of each area's 'to be delivered by' date).
14. As such, a further update on each area will be provided at the next quarterly update.

Contact and Email

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