

Agenda Item No:

Report To: Audit Committee

Date of Meeting: 24 November 2020

Report Title: Annual Governance Statement – Progress on Remedying Exceptions

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Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Neil Bell

Portfolio Holder for: Finance & IT

Summary:	This report updates on the progress made towards the areas of review highlighted by the 2019-2020 Annual Governance Statement
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Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: N/A

Recommendations: **The Audit Committee is asked to note the progress made towards the areas of review highlighted by the 2019-20 Annual Governance Statement as detailed in this report.**

Policy Overview: Each year the council must produce and approve an Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The AGS is 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: Not required as this is a monitoring report which doesn't propose any change to the council's processes or procedures.

Data Protection Impact Assessment: Not required.

Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement): The council has a low risk appetite towards compliance matters. The Annual Governance Statement makes recommendations for improvements to ensure that any

Other Material Implications:	potential risks highlighted are mitigated against. None
Exempt from Publication:	NO
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Report Title: Annual Governance Statement – Progress on Remediating Exceptions

Introduction and Background

1. Each year the council must produce and approve an Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The ASG is 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 draws conclusions, based on evidence throughout the past year, about the effectiveness of the council's arrangements.
2. The 2019-2020 Annual Governance Statement (AGS) was agreed at the March 2020 meeting of the Audit Committee. The ASG identified six areas for continued work and review which are set out in the table below:

	Governance Area	Responsible	To be delivered by
1.	Review of Contract Standing Orders	Corporate Property and Projects	September 2020
2.	Review the Key Performance Indicator suite	Corporate Policy	September 2020
3.	Develop an Equalities Policy	Corporate Policy	December 2020
4.	Work towards compliance with website accessibility guidelines	Communications	September 2020
5.	Review of Records of Processing Activity	Corporate Policy	March 2021
6.	Update Committee report template and associated guidance	Corporate Policy/Member Services	June 2020

3. This report provides updates on the progress made towards these areas of review highlighted by the 2019-2020 Annual Governance Statement.

Progress to Date

4. Review the contract standing orders

The council has Contract Standing Orders (CSOs) which is an internal document detailing the rules and regulations relating to the procurement of Works, Goods (Supplies) and Services. The last review of the CSO's took place in 2015 and therefore a further review was required to amend the financial thresholds, review delegations and update the document in line with current legislation. The review took place earlier this year and the amendments were agreed at Full Council on 16 July 2020. Therefore this action can be considered complete.

5. Review the Key Performance Indicator Suite

The review of the council's key performance indicators (KPIs) was originally intended to ensure that the council was delivering the ambition of the new Corporate Plan which was being developed at the time the 2019/20 Annual Governance Statement was issued. As a result of Covid-19, a Recovery Plan has been adopted in place of a Corporate Plan. The review of the KPIs has therefore looked to ensure out measures are focused on Recovery across the themes of:

- Organisation Change and Workforce Development
- Regeneration, Infrastructure and Placemaking
- Community Recovery
- Economic Recovery

The new KPIs were adopted together with the Recovery Plan by the Cabinet in July 2020 and Full Council in October 2020. How the council is performing against the KPIs is being monitored by the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In addition, a Recovery Plan Monitoring Advisory Group has been established and is meeting regularly to provide Member oversight of these measures together with the actions set out in the Plan. Therefore, this action can be considered complete.

6. Develop an Equalities Policy

In line with Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty, the council has recently reviewed and adopted new Equalities Objectives which are set out within the Recovery Plan. The next step is to articulate the delivery of the objectives through a policy document. The draft policy is currently being drafted. The impact of Covid-19 has meant a slightly extended timescale for delivery but it is currently expected that the Policy will be brought to the council's Cabinet for adoption by April 2021.

7. Work towards compliance with website accessibility guidelines

New websites have had to comply with working towards the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines since 22 September 2019, so significant efforts have been made to ensure our previous website (which was classed as new due to a rebrand two years ago) was as accessible as possible up until it was replaced by our new site on 2 August 2020.

The new website is being developed in phases so work continues to maximise its' accessibility. An audit by Smarter Digital Solutions was carried out in July 2020, just before the new website went live. This flagged several issues, such as navigating the website with a keyboard only, which we rectified before the website went live. We have combined manual tests of the site with automated testing through our SiteImprove software. Our current SiteImprove accessibility score is 83.5/100. We are now addressing the outstanding issues to bring the score up even higher. We continue to update the [accessibility statement on our website](#) to reflect our accessibility, removing issues from the statement once they are resolved.

Pdf documents have been the biggest barrier to website accessibility. All pdfs that have been uploaded to the website since 22 September 2019 have been formatted to be accessible for screen readers before they are published on the website. We are continuing to work our way through formatting our historic documents, or converting them to webpage content. Good progress has been made with approximately 650 formatted to-date and 166 pdfs remaining.

8. Review of Record of Processing Activity

Each council service maintains a Record of Processing Activity (RoPA) which were created when the General Data Protection Regulation came into force. The RoPAs set out information about the types of data processed by services, retention periods and the legal basis for the processing. Over the past year, the council's Corporate Information Governance Group has been holding dedicated sessions with council services to review their RoPAs with a particular focus on retention to ensure compliance and recommend proportionate solutions where required. Whilst the Group did not meet regularly during the first Covid-19 lockdown period, it has reconvened and continues with this work.

9. Update of Committee report template and associated guidance

Reports to the council's committees are consistently presented through the use of a corporate committee template. The template ensures that due consideration has been given to relevant factors to inform decision makers such as equalities impact, financial implications, risks and consultation. The committee template has been reviewed to ensure that all relevant implications are considered, new guidance issued and a briefing to council managers on changes to the template has taken place. New implications for report authors to consider include sustainability, risk appetite and data protection.

Conclusion and Next Steps

10. Good progress has been made towards completion of the actions arising from the 2019/20 Annual Governance Statement.
11. The review of the Records of Processing Activity is a continuous process but good progress has been made to-date. Similarly work to the website to improve its accessibility will continue but the significant majority is now compliant. Work is underway on the development of the Equality Policy which will be brought forward to the council's Cabinet over the coming months. Further updates will be provided at future meetings of this Committee until the actions are complete.

Contact and Email

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