

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2023/24

Introduction

1. This is Charnwood Borough Council's Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24. It provides:
 - An acknowledgement of responsibility for the Council's system of governance;
 - A summary of the assessment of the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements;
 - An opinion on the level of assurance that the Council's governance arrangements can provide;
 - An action plan for 2024/25;
 - A summary of progress against actions raised in the previous year's Annual Governance Statement;
 - A statement on conformance with CIPFA's Statement on the Role of the Chief Finance Officer;
 - A conclusion.
2. The Annual Governance Statement will be published on the Council's website as part of the Council's statement of accounts. The Annual Governance Statement is required by Regulation 6(1) (b) of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, and is compliant with the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government 2016 Edition (the Framework).

Responsibility for the Governance Framework

3. Charnwood Borough Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
4. In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.
5. The Council has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA / SOLACE Framework (2016).
6. Key responsibilities within the governance framework are summarised in the table below.

<p>Council, Cabinet, Leader</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Provide leadership ➤ Set, develop & implement policy ➤ Ensure that the Corporate Strategy 2024-28 priorities are delivered ➤ Develop, approve and implement the Budget & Policy framework ➤ Support the Borough's residents and businesses 	<p>Leadership & Decision Making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ All decision making meetings held in public (except where 'exempt') ➤ Decisions published on the Council's website ➤ Resources and funding directed as per the priorities of the Corporate Strategy 2024-28 	<p>Risk Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Risk registers identify both strategic and operational risks ➤ Strategic risks are monitored regularly by the corporate leadership team and by the Audit Committee
<p>Scrutiny and Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Scrutiny Commission review council policies and decisions, and can hold Cabinet to account ➤ Finance & Performance Scrutiny monitor revenue and capital budgets, and performance against targets ➤ Audit Committee oversees internal audit and other assurance functions, and external audit reports ➤ Member Conduct Committee oversees councillor conduct 	<p>Senior and Corporate Leadership Teams (SLT & CLT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Chief Executive is the Head of Paid Service and is responsible for leading effective senior and corporate leadership teams ➤ SLT comprises the Chief Executive and Directors and provides strategic direction for the council's services ➤ CLT comprises SLT plus Heads of Service, and provides operational direction and monitoring ➤ The Director of Finance, Governance & Contracts is the s151 officer with statutory responsibility for sound budgeting and financial management arrangements ➤ The Head of Democracy is the Monitoring Officer with statutory responsibility for ensuring legality, good governance and promoting high standards of conduct 	

Review Of The Effectiveness Of The Governance Framework

7. The Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the senior managers within the Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the annual Internal Audit report, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.
8. A summary of the Council's governance framework is set out in the Annex to this statement. The Council considers that its corporate governance arrangements are effective and support the delivery of the principles of good governance.
9. The Council's statutory officers consist of the Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive), the Monitoring Officer (Head of Democracy), and the s.151 Officer (Director of Finance, Governance & Contracts). These officers fulfil the required statutory duties associated with their roles, including ensuring that the Council's activities are in accordance with the law and legislative requirements, and that financial budgets are set appropriately and are monitored regularly.
10. The Council's Internal Audit service operates according to an annual audit programme which is developed using a risk based approach designed to ensure that key financial systems and significant Council services are audited at appropriate frequencies so that sufficient assurance on adequacy of the internal control environment and risk management arrangements can be provided.
11. The Council's Chief Audit Executive's annual opinion was presented to the Audit Committee on 16 July 2024. Based upon all of the work undertaken by Internal Audit during the year, an opinion of reasonable assurance on the overall control environment was given.
12. Internal Audit identified the following areas of limited assurance during the year: Planned and cyclical maintenance – kitchen & bathrooms, Responsive repairs – materials, Mould & damp, Corporate Policy Management, Remote support & data exchange, iTrent application review, Selective/HMO Licensing and Responsive repairs – contract management. Management have agreed to implement 96% of the resulting recommendations, and implementation will be monitored by the Internal Audit team.
13. The s151 officer has undertaken a review of the effectiveness of the Council's system of internal control, as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. Section 3 of the Regulations state that:

A relevant authority must ensure that it has a sound system of internal control which—

(a) facilitates the effective exercise of its functions and the achievement of its aims and objectives;

(b) ensures that the financial and operational management of the authority is effective; and

(c) includes effective arrangements for the management of risk.

Section 6 of the Regulations requires that:

A relevant authority must, each financial year; (a) conduct a review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control required by regulation 3.

14. In conducting his review the s151 officer observed the following matters:
 - The Council has an extant Corporate Strategy and Business Plan, together with other supporting strategies and policies that provide direction and guidance to the effective exercise of its functions and fulfilment of its objectives
 - The Council has well established governance arrangements and protocols that ensure that there is adequate oversight over decision making and that decisions are supported by appropriate legal and financial clearances;
 - Controls over decision making are balanced with use of delegations to ensure that decision making is at the right level and not overly centralised, and can be conducted on a timely basis
 - Financial management of the Council is based on the Financial Regulations and Financial Procedure rules that cover procurement and expenditure matters; these rules are reviewed regularly and overseen by an experienced and well qualified team
 - Financial management and control processes are also underpinned by the internal audit function and the role of Members through the Cabinet, Committee and Scrutiny processes
 - Risk management processes are recorded and managed both at Member level, through the auspices of Cabinet and the Audit Committee, and amongst senior officers through the regular Corporate Leadership Team risk management workshops
 - A strategic risk register is approved annually by Cabinet, and kept under regular review by the Audit Committee and the Corporate Leadership Team
 - Generally, in the opinion of the s151 officer the Council member and officer groups, have sufficient independence, experience, capability, capacity and qualifications to ensure that segregation of duties exist, that decisions are adequately supported and robustly challenged.
15. Based on his review, the s151 officer has concluded that overall the Council's system of internal control is effective.
16. Senior managers, and the Audit Committee and Scrutiny Committees are responsible for receiving and considering regular monitoring reports in respect of the risk management framework, the performance management framework, and the work of Internal Audit. The Audit Committee also receive and consider any reports arising from the work of the external auditors.
17. These arrangements and processes ensure that the Council's corporate governance and internal control arrangements are kept under regular and ongoing review throughout each financial year.

18. Additionally, as part of the process to produce the Annual Governance Statement, a comprehensive review of all sources of evidence, including external review, audit and inspection work undertaken during the year, has been undertaken.
19. The annual audit letter issued by the external auditors (Mazars) for 2022/23 identified one significant deficiency in internal control relating to disclosure of related party transactions. This concerned former councillors who had (for various reasons) not remained in their seats following the 2023 elections and is not considered to reflect an ongoing issue.

Assurance Opinion

20. The Council considers that overall, the governance arrangements in place during 2023/24 provided a significant level of assurance, and continue to be fit for purpose.

Action Plan For 2024/25

21. No specific actions have been identified for 2024/25. Ongoing governance controls will be operated in line with standard operating procedures.

Progress Against Actions Raised In The Previous Year's Annual Governance Statement

22. The officer task and finish group in relation to the iTrent system met on a regular basis and material concerns were addressed. The group continues to meet on a less frequent basis for monitoring purposes. A 'health check' of the system was also obtained from an external specialist consultant and recommendations made have been addressed.

Conformance With The Governance Requirements Of The CIPFA Statement On The Role Of The Chief Finance Officer

23. The Chief Financial Officer of the Council is the Director of Governance, Governance & Contracts. This role is one of four that comprise the Council's senior leadership team and reports directly to the Chief Executive. These arrangements, both in design and in day to day practice, enable the financial aspects of material business decisions to be given due weight.
24. The Council maintains an effective system of financial control which is clearly set out within the Council's financial regulations and procedure rules. Control and oversight is facilitated by an effective internal audit function and underpinned by a strong culture of careful management of public money demonstrated by all managers. The efficacy of the control environment can be evidenced through the Council's recent history of financial outturns, and the timeliness and quality of its financial statements and other financial returns.
25. The Chief Financial Officer is the Council's Section 151 Officer (from section 151, Local Government Act 1972) and in accordance with the statutory requirements

covering this role has an appropriate accountancy qualification, being a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. The Deputy Section 151 Officer (who is the Council's Head of Finance) is a member of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants. Both have significant experience in local government. In the view of the Chief Financial Officer, the Council's finance function is considered adequately resourced and contains a mix of staff with appropriate levels of professional qualifications and experience.

26. In the opinion of the Chief Financial Officer the authority's financial management arrangements conform with the requirements of the *CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government*.

Conclusion

27. The Council is committed to the principles of sound and effective governance, and will continue to monitor implementation as part of the next annual review.



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Rob Mitchell
Chief Executive

Date: 21st November 2024



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Councillor Jewel Miah
Leader of the Council

Date: 21st November 2024

Summary of Charnwood Borough Council's Governance Framework Arrangements

The key elements of the Council's governance framework are as follows: -

- ◆ The Council's objectives are set out in the Corporate Strategy and this is reviewed through Cabinet and wider consultation with local partners and the community. The achievement of the plan is monitored through performance management and review processes carried out by Cabinet, Scrutiny committees and officers.
- ◆ A rigorous and robust annual service delivery and team planning process is in place that includes consultation with service users where appropriate, and which ensures that resources and budgets are aligned to the corporate objectives set out in the Corporate Plan, as well as providing for a controlled and objective means of identifying efficiency savings and opportunities for investment to improve service delivery.
- ◆ Policies determined during the financial year are approved by Council or Cabinet as appropriate following thorough consultation with key stakeholders and the local community where appropriate.
- ◆ A corporate complaints procedure is in operation, and is appropriately publicised via the Council's website and other means. All complaints are investigated and corrective action taken to improve processes and procedures where appropriate. The complaints procedure has been subject a scrutiny review, and recommendations for improvements have been implemented.
- ◆ A sound system of internal controls is in place to ensure value for money is obtained and that funds and resources are used appropriately. This includes detailed Financial Regulations, and supporting Financial Procedures, which are reviewed and updated periodically.
- ◆ The Council's constitution sets out the terms of reference for all member committees, including executive and decision making functions, and the scrutiny function.
- ◆ A member/officer protocol is in place which sets out the expectations and processes that are in place to ensure effective and constructive working relationships.
- ◆ A scheme of delegation has been approved and is regularly updated, which clearly sets out which responsibilities have been delegated to officers, and how these delegations should operate and be recorded.
- ◆ Codes of conduct are in place for members and officers, which clearly specify the required standards of conduct and behaviour, and which require the declaration of any personal interests which may conflict with the interests of the Council.
- ◆ Registers are maintained to record any declarations of interest made by members or officers.

- ◆ A 'whistle-blowing' policy is in place for any members, officers or other parties to report suspicions of fraud or other irregularities, and all such reported instances are investigated thoroughly.
- ◆ A Member Conduct Committee is in place to oversee the process for any allegations relating to the behaviour or conduct of members.
- ◆ A Code of Corporate Governance is in place which sets out the Council's approach towards, and requirements for achieving good corporate governance.
- ◆ All Cabinet reports recommending decisions include details of any relevant financial and legal implications, and contain a risk management section which sets out any identified risks together with their likelihood and impact, and actions planned to manage the risks.
- ◆ A scrutiny function is in place which has the right to call-in any executive decisions for comment and challenge.
- ◆ A risk management framework has been established under which strategic risks which may cause the Council to be unable to operate or provide key services leading to a significant adverse effect on public wellbeing are identified on an annual basis, are approved by Cabinet, and subsequently monitored on a quarterly basis by senior managers and by the Audit Committee. Lower level operational risks are identified by the annual service delivery planning process and are monitored on an ongoing quarterly basis, with any exceptions or significant concerns being escalated to senior managers and to the Audit Committee.
- ◆ A regular personal review is undertaken for all officers, which includes the identification of training and development needs, which are then considered and built into a service level and corporate training programme where appropriate.
- ◆ A Member Development Strategy has been approved and there is an ongoing programme of training courses for councillors. An intensive induction programme is in place for new councillors.
- ◆ Thorough and rigorous recruitment and selection processes for officers are in place, and workforce succession planning is undertaken to ensure capacity and continuity issues are identified and addressed.
- ◆ The scrutiny function consists of the Scrutiny Commission and the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee. Other scrutiny panels are set up to examine issues on a task and finish basis.
- ◆ The Audit Committee has responsibility for overseeing the production of the annual statement of accounts, and for the work of Internal Audit. The committee aims to fulfil the core functions of an audit committee as recommended by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy, and is chaired by an independent person who has appropriate experience and qualifications.

- ◆ The Council has an Internal Audit function which operates in accordance with appropriate requirements and guidance, and which is responsible for providing assurance on the adequacy of internal control and risk management arrangements.
- ◆ The Council has identified all of its significant partnerships, and has undertaken a risk assessment for all of these partnerships, including ensuring appropriate governance arrangements are in place.
- ◆ Appropriate employment policies and procedures are in place to ensure responsibilities to staff are met and that employment legislation is complied with. These include disciplinary and capability policies.
- ◆ Appropriate mechanisms are in place to measure quality of service to users, including use of the 'Govmetric' satisfaction monitoring tool for all major access channels.
- ◆ Appropriate arrangements are in place to respond to 'freedom of information' (FOI) requests in accordance with statutory requirements.
- ◆ Compliance with internal policies and procedures is ensured by various means, including management checks and the work of Internal Audit.