

Report to Audit Committee
14 July 2020
Report of Interim Audit Manager
Subject Draft Annual Governance Statement 2019-20

Item

6

Purpose

This report presents the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2019/20 for consideration by the Audit Committee prior to sign off by the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council.

Recommendation

The committee is asked to consider if the AGS is consistent with their own perspective on internal control within the council, plus the governance issues and actions.

Corporate and service priorities

The report helps to meet support corporate priorities through supporting a healthy organisation.

Ward/s: All wards

Cabinet member: Councillor Kendrick – Resources

Contact officers

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Background documents

None.

Report

Background

1. The Audit and Account Regulations 2015 requires the council to produce an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) to accompany the Statement of Accounts. The AGS summarises the extent to which the Council is complying with its Code of Corporate Governance and details, as appropriate, any significant actions needed to improve the governance arrangements in the year ahead. The final statement will be signed by the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council.
2. The AGS is an important statutory requirement which enhances public reporting of governance matters. It should therefore be honest and open, favouring disclosure.
3. The draft AGS is presented to the committee in order to ensure that it reasonably reflects the committee's knowledge and experience of the council's governance and controls.

The Annual Governance Statement

4. The draft AGS has been compiled using sources of evidence, including:
 - A review of the extent to which the Council has complied with each element of its Code of Corporate Governance;
 - Self-assurance statements prepared by Service Directors;
 - The LGSS Chief Internal Auditor's opinion on the Council's internal control environment, which will be formally reported to the Audit Committee on 14th July 2020.
 - A review by the corporate leadership team.
5. The Statement is prepared in accordance with guidance from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE). The guidance states that the AGS should include:
 - The Council's responsibilities for ensuring a sound system of governance;
 - An assessment of the effectiveness of key elements of the governance framework, and the role of those responsible for the development and maintenance of the governance environment;
 - An opinion on the level of assurance that the governance arrangements can provide and whether these continue to be regarded as fit for purpose;
 - The identification of any significant governance issues, and agreed actions taken, or proposed, to deal with significant governance issues;
 - A conclusion demonstrating a commitment to monitoring implementation through the next annual review.
6. 'Significant governance issues' are those that:
 - 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 Chief Internal Auditor 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; or
- have resulted in formal action being undertaken by the Chief Financial Officer and / or the Monitoring Officer.

The Code of Governance

7. The council's governance arrangements are documented in its Local Code of Governance. This includes references to the relevant local codes, policies and procedures. CIPFA / SOLACE provide guidance which is intended to be used as best practice for developing and maintaining a locally adopted code of governance.
8. The guidance provides seven principles of good governance, to categorise examples within the code. The guidance was reviewed to reflect that councils may be operating differently due austerity measures, and legislative changes such as the Localism Act 2011 and the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016.
9. Consequently, the principles and terminology in the guidance have been updated to reflect these changes, and it is good practice to update the council's Local Code of Governance as well.
10. The Code of Governance is Appendix 19 of the Constitution.
11. Article 17 of the Constitution (Audit Committee) states that the Audit Committee should "*Review, consider and agree the AGS including the adequacy of the corporate governance framework and improvement action plan contained within it*". The Code of Governance is part of the corporate governance framework.
12. Article 15 of the Constitution (Review and revision of the Constitutionⁱ) states that "*Changes to the appendices of this constitution will be made by the director of resources, to reflect decisions taken in accordance with the constitution of the council, the cabinet, a committee or the chief executive as the case may be*". The director of resources has recommended that the Code of Governance is also reviewed by the constitution working party.

Timetable

13. The date for final publication of the accounts and AGS has been put back to 30 November. The AGS will continue to be reviewed up to that point to ensure that it is current at the time of final publication. Actions associated with the AGS will be reported during the year to the Audit Committee.

Conclusion

14. The draft AGS has been prepared, in accordance with professional guidance, and accompanies the Statement of Accounts. The process demonstrates good governance, it has been based on various sources of assurance, and the Committee is asked to consider the AGS. It will also be reviewed by the external

auditors, and the final version will be signed by the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council.



Annual Governance Statement 2019-20

1. Scope of responsibility

- 1.1. Norwich City 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. Norwich City 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.
- 1.2. In discharging this overall responsibility, Norwich City 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.
- 1.3. Norwich City Council has approved and adopted a code of governance which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/ SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government. The code forms appendix 19 of the council's constitution which is on the council website at www.norwich.gov.uk.
- 1.4. This statement explains how Norwich City Council has complied with the principles of the code and also meets the requirements of regulation 6 (1) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an annual governance statement.
- 1.5. In April 2012 the council transferred the ICT and finance functions to LGSS, a public sector partnership between Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire county councils. The arrangement is covered by a service level agreement. This arrangement was extended in April 2017 for a further five years.
- 1.6 Under the arrangement, some of the roles which the annual governance statement refers to are carried out by officers from LGSS such as the council's chief finance officer and s151 officer and the head of internal audit. From April 2020 these roles will be brought back in-house and carried out by appropriately qualified and experienced officers.
- 1.7 The role of Monitoring Officer is carried out by a senior officer from NpLaw.



2. The purpose of the governance framework

- 2.1 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the council is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with, and leads its communities. It enables the council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate services and value for money.
- 2.2 The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of Norwich City Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood and potential impact of those risks being realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.
- 2.3 The governance framework has been in place at Norwich City Council for the year ended 31 March 2020 and up to the date of the approval of this statement.

3. The governance framework

- 3.1 The council's Code of Governance recognises that effective governance is achieved through the following core principles:
 - Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.
 - Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
 - Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits
 - Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
 - Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
 - Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
 - Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability



4. Key elements of the Governance Framework

The following is a brief description of the key elements of the systems and processes that comprise the council's governance arrangements:

1. Developing codes of conduct which define standards of behaviour for members and staff, and policies dealing with whistleblowing and conflicts of interest and that these codes and policies are communicated effectively:

- Under the Localism Act 2011 the new standards regime was adopted by council on 19 June 2012, including the members' code of conduct as documented in Appendix 13 of the Councils Constitution. Changes are likely to be brought in relating to a new Standards framework later this year based on guidance from the LGA to all Local Authorities.
- Training is provided to new members, any issues or failings are reported at Standard Committee meetings and advice is provided to members by the monitoring officer as identified, or as requested.
- There is a separate code of conduct for employees, which is supported by HR policies and procedures. New employees are given a copy of the code of conduct and other key policies, and there are regular reminders regarding compliance with the policies. Employees are required to confirm that they have read the code of conduct and other key policies.

2. Ensuring compliance with relevant laws and regulations, internal policies and procedures, and that expenditure is lawful:

- The chief finance officer is responsible for advising whether decisions of the cabinet and council are in accordance with the policy and budget framework.
- Budget managers have responsibility for ensuring that all proposals, decisions and actions incurring expenditure were lawful.
- Corporate policies and strategies, which are subject to regular review, are available on the council intranet. Employees are required to confirm that they have read key policies relating to conduct, security and certain personnel matters.
- Managers within the council are responsible for putting in place systems of control to ensure compliance with policies, procedures, laws and regulations. This is a key control and as such each year heads of service are asked to conduct a self-assessment of the systems of internal control within their services and highlight actions intended to address any areas for improvement.

3. Documenting a commitment to openness and acting in the public interest:

- Progress on delivering the Corporate Plan is communicated through a performance management framework. The Scrutiny Committee receives regular reports on performance against the Corporate Plan in addition to matters referred to it by Cabinet. In order to demonstrate its openness the Authority also publishes:
 - Constitution
 - Council, Cabinet and Committee Reports
 - Scheme of delegation to officers



- Various transparency reports, such as Pay Policy Statement and Payments over £500

4. Establishing clear channels of communication with all sections of the community and other stakeholders, ensuring accountability and encouraging open consultation:

- The council is part of Your Voice, a partnership of local organisations which enables anyone to sign up and have their say on services through consultations, surveys, focus groups and workshops, to name a few.
- The council's Customer first guidance for staff is intended to ensure that everything the council produces and sends out is easy for everyone to understand. It is supported by the Communications strategy and Communications handbook which helps staff to deal with communications issues.
- Residents are informed about the council's activities at all times. This is done through Citizen, the quarterly magazine for residents; work with the local media; the council website; social media and other channels. Council tenants also receive their own magazine, TLC, focusing on issues affecting them. Both of these publications are available on the council's internet.
- Tenants have a range of ways to be involved and these are detailed on the tenant involvement page of the council website. There is a clear framework with formal group structures for tenants and leaseholders, including seven active tenant and resident associations.
- In addition, a range of other options allows tenants to be involved at a level that suits them. These consist of the 1,200 tenant and leaseholder TalkBack panel used for surveys and focus groups, tenant inspectors, involvement in estate walkabouts and mystery shoppers. Proactive work by the tenant involvement team means that events and road shows are regularly held to encourage more tenants to be involved or simply give their views on services they receive.
- Any public consultations that are planned for the year are included in service plans. All consultations are co-ordinated by the council's business management group and reviewed on a quarterly basis.
- Information on current and closed consultations, including reports and minutes, is available on the council website.

5. Developing and communicating a vision which specifies intended outcomes for citizens and service users and is used as a basis for planning:

- The council has a clear vision of what it is trying to achieve, as set out in its corporate plan 2019-2022, which forms the council's overarching policy framework.
- The changing pace council blueprint (operating model) has been developed as a guide for how Norwich City Council designs services and structures to deliver the vision and priorities within its corporate plan in a way that proactively addresses the financial pressures and changing policy and legislative environment it faces.
- Details of all the above, together with any committee reports referred to in this statement, can be found on the council website at www.norwich.gov.uk



- The corporate plan sets out the city council's strategic direction including its vision, mission and priorities. The corporate plan 2019-2022 was approved by council on 26 February 2019.
- This has been developed in the light of the wider city vision work, which has been undertaken under the 'Norwich 2040' banner. This started with a significant piece of resident and stakeholder engagement to identify consensus about what the strengths and challenges of Norwich are. It then continued with analysis of the findings to shape a vision for Norwich in 2040 which provides a shared set of aspirations for Norwich
- The city vision is therefore the starting point for this corporate plan. This has been combined with information and analysis including:
 - Analysing information on levels of need in the city such as looking at demographics, economic, environmental and equalities data
 - Assessing the current environment the council operates in, including the national and local economic climate and policy and legislation for local government.
 - Understanding how other local authorities are responding to similar challenges
 - Looking at the potential future factors that may impact on Norwich and the council
 - Discussions with councillors and officers
 - Reflecting the Medium Term Financial Strategy and transformation programme which helps plan resource allocation
- The draft corporate plan was informed by consultation with members, residents, local organisations and other stakeholders.
- Medium term financial plans are presented to council on an annual basis for the general fund and Housing Revenue Account along with capital, investment and treasury management strategies. The plans set out the level of general fund savings that need to be achieved in the coming and each of the following four years. An annual consultation on the budget is also undertaken. The delivery of the corporate priorities is managed through service plans for each service area and monitored through the council's performance management and reporting system.

6. Translating the vision into courses of action for the authority, its partnerships and collaborations:

- The council's vision and mission are:
 - The corporate vision – To make Norwich a fine city for all
 - The corporate mission – To put people and the city first
- The three corporate priorities are:
 - People living well
 - Great neighbourhoods, local environment and housing
 - Inclusive economy



- The corporate plan is underpinned by a range of strategic and operational plans, which set out in more detail how the council's vision and priorities will be delivered. These plans contain more specific targets, which are allocated to teams, contractors, partners and employees to deliver.
- Service plans are being replaced by cross cutting strategies and team plans will be adapted to ensure a golden thread from each employee up to the corporate priorities and encourage a more joined up way of working as envisaged in the Fit for the Future Programme

7. Reviewing the effectiveness of the authority's decision-making framework, including delegation arrangements, decision making in partnerships and robustness of data quality:

- The council's decision making framework is set out in the council's constitution including an effective scheme of delegation. The council's constitution is kept under continuous review in line with best practice, with a clear review plan, supported by a corporate governance group consisting of the director of resources, monitoring officer, chief finance officer (section 151 officer), head of HR and learning, director of people and neighbourhoods and local LGSS principal auditor. There is also a cross-party constitution working party - where major changes are proposed by the corporate governance group or the monitoring officer and director of resources these are considered by the constitution working party before being recommended to council for approval.
- Key partnerships have been identified and are included in the council's partnership register. The financial contribution and risk for key partnerships are reviewed and the results are reported to cabinet annually

8. Measuring the performance of services and related projects and ensuring that they are delivered in accordance with defined outcomes and that they represent the best use of resources and value for money:

- Performance management in the council is based on corporate plan priorities supported by a strategic management framework. The plan has a number of priorities and key performance measures and the team planning process is designed to explicitly reflect these priorities. The corporate plan is underpinned by team plans which set out how the top priorities will be delivered, and by operational delivery plans which set out practical steps and performance measures for all teams.
- The council uses an electronic performance management system which supports the performance management regime by holding high level indicators, risks and actions used to deliver the corporate plan. Performance is reported monthly to portfolio holders, quarterly to cabinet and twice-yearly to scrutiny.
- The council is a member of HouseMark, which is the main benchmarking organisation for social housing. Norwich is a major subscriber and also a member of HouseMark clubs dealing with welfare reform and ASB issues comparing and shaping good practice. The council is also a founder / board member of ARCH (Association of Retained Council Housing) which promotes council housing and shares good practice through the exchange of ideas and seminars. The council also has active tenancy scrutiny and involvement panels which enable tenants to be involved with contract monitoring and procurement.



- A summary of the overall performance of the council in 2019-20 is included in the narrative report to the statement of accounts for the year ending 31 March 2020.
- A key component of the council's performance framework and its drive for quality improvement is the work of internal audit. Their work assists management in an advisory and proactive capacity in addition to providing traditional assurance on systems and the control environment.
- Change and transformation within the council is underpinned by its changing pace blueprint (operating model) to ensure the council meets its savings targets while continuing to improve services and delivery models wherever possible. This approach is supported by a range of tools such as the council's organisational change toolkit to ensure staffing changes are carried out effectively, and its project management toolkit to ensure the effective delivery of projects.
- The ongoing process of transformation is driven by the corporate leadership team and business management group (involving all the heads of service) with regular briefings for the leader and portfolio holders and major change proposals being formally approved by Cabinet and Council as appropriate.

9. Defining and documenting the roles and responsibilities of members and management, with clear protocols for effective communication in respect of the authority and partnership arrangements:

- The council's constitution sets out how the council operates, and contains separate articles and appendices covering executive, non-executive, scrutiny and officer functions. In addition, there are separate appendices covering the scheme of delegations to officers, the protocol for member/officer working arrangements, and protocols for the chief finance officer and monitoring officer.
- There is also an agreed protocol between the leader and chief executive officer covering their working arrangements.
- The council has a corporate governance framework for working in partnerships, with significant partnerships and joint ventures such as those with LGSS (partnering and delegation agreement with service level agreements), NpLaw (delegation agreement and a joint management board with 2 out of 8 places for the council) and NPS Norwich Limited, Norwich Norse Building Limited and Norwich Norse Environmental Limited (shareholders' agreement, 2 places out of 5 on each of the company boards, articles of association of the companies, company business plans and contracts for services).

10. Ensuring that financial management arrangements conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2015) and, where they do not, explain why and how they deliver the same impact.):

- The role of the chief finance officer (CFO) and the finance function were sourced through a partnership and delegation agreement with LGSS, a public sector shared services organisation. The finance function will be insourced from LGSS to the Council from April 2020.
- The governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2015) were embedded within the



agreement. Performance against these requirements was regularly monitored to ensure compliance. The council continually seeks to improve financial management practices and processes to deliver sound financial governance.

11. Ensuring effective arrangements are in place for the discharge of the monitoring officer function:

- The monitoring officer is a statutory appointment under section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. The current responsibilities of the monitoring officer rest with a senior officer at Nplaw, the council's shared legal service. The deputy monitoring officer roles rest with nominated officers at the council. They undertake to discharge their statutory responsibilities with a positive determination and in a manner that enhances the overall reputation of the council. In doing so they will also safeguard, so far as is possible, members and officers whilst acting in their official capacities, from legal difficulties and/or criminal sanctions.
- It is important that members and officers work together to promote good governance within the council. The monitoring officer plays a key role in this and therefore it is vital that members and officers work with the monitoring officer to discharge the statutory responsibilities and other duties (as set out in appendix 9b of the constitution).
- There are working arrangements and understandings in place between the monitoring officer, members and the corporate leadership team which are designed to ensure the effective discharge of the council's business and functions. These arrangements are detailed in the monitoring officer protocol, which currently forms appendix 9B of the council's constitution.
- The Council has appointed directors as deputy monitoring officers to cover a conflict of interest if the monitoring officer or NpLaw cannot advise.

12. Ensuring effective arrangements are in place for the discharge of the head of paid service function:

- The role of head of paid service is defined in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. In Norwich City Council it is assigned to the chief executive as set out in appendix 8 of the constitution and all necessary powers are delegated to him/her to fulfil the statutory role. Article 12 of the constitution requires the head of paid service to determine and publicise a description of the overall departmental structure of the Council showing the management structure and deployment of officers.
- The head of paid service, despite having all the necessary authority to take delegated staffing decisions, has chosen to exercise his/her discretion on a number of occasions and has reported to cabinet on changes to the senior management structure or on significant changes to the organisation's structure as an aid to transparency. These proposals are discussed at the corporate leadership team and proposed to cabinet. All cabinet papers are circulated to all members. The council's senior management structure is set out in appendix 17 of the constitution and publicised on the council's web site.
- The council is also required to provide the head of paid service with staff, accommodation and other resources sufficient to enable the performance of the function. In Norwich City Council, the annual budget proposed to council by cabinet, prepared by officers, seeks to align the provision of council resources with



the delivery of the corporate plan. In this manner, the head of paid service is ensuring that the council is fulfilling its duty. During the year, any proposals that are made to significantly alter the manner of service delivery, to reduce or enhance a service, sets out the staffing and resource implications for that proposal. This is standardised in committee report formats to ensure that all relevant matters are considered when proposals are made. All cabinet papers are subject to scrutiny.

- A review (or appraisal) of the chief executive's performance is undertaken each year. The process is managed by an independent individual and takes account of the views of the Leader, cabinet and each opposition leader about how the chief executive has discharged all of his/her functions in relation to the role. There are also informal opportunities throughout the year for the adequacy of the chief executives performance to be discussed e.g. at weekly leader meetings and monthly meetings of group leaders.
- A new chief executive was appointed by the Council in November 2019, and took on the duties as head of paid service from January 2020.

13. Providing induction and identifying the development needs of members and senior officers in relation to their strategic roles, supported by appropriate training:

- The cross-party councillors' development group sets the strategic and policy direction for all aspects of councillor development which includes:
 - promoting the development of members
 - developing, monitoring and evaluating the councillors training and development programme
- A full programme of training and development has been agreed by the group including a monthly schedule of both training sessions and briefings.
- Managers have a portfolio of learning and development available to them which is designed to develop their skills and to support achievement of the organisation's priorities. The Changing PACE values provide the overarching framework for development and include behaviours expected from all employees. There is an employee performance review which provides individual and team objectives and through which learning and development needs for all employees and managers are identified. A corporate learning and development plan is created to support employees in line with current and future needs.

14. Reviewing the effectiveness of the framework for identifying and managing risks and for performance and demonstrating clear accountability:

- The council has a risk management policy and a risk management strategy, which have been approved by cabinet and are published to the council website.
- The council's corporate risk register is the result of continued review by managers, corporate leadership team and audit committee of the key risks that may have an impact on achieving the council's objectives. Each risk shows the owner and the key controls in place to minimise any impact on the council and its provision of



services to stakeholders. Individual projects and partnerships are also subject to risk assessments.

- The risk management charter was considered by Audit Committee on 12 March 2019 and by Cabinet on 6 February 2019. The council's risk management policy was updated, approved by Cabinet in January 2017 and was updated in 2019/20 in line with the risk management charter.
- Service risks are included in service plans and are reviewed by departmental management teams. Any risks that are considered to be of a corporate nature are escalated to the corporate leadership team for possible inclusion in the corporate risk register.
- The council has a corporate business continuity plan for the effective management of business continuity issues, in order to ensure the continued delivery of services. Both business continuity and the management of major contracts are included in the corporate risk register. A business continuity policy and framework was approved by Cabinet on 25 June 2014.

15. Ensuring effective counter fraud and anti-corruption arrangements are developed and maintained in accordance with the Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption (CIPFA, 2014):

- The council has recently reviewed its counter fraud arrangements, reflecting professional guidance and good practice, and has published revised anti-fraud and corruption, whistleblowing and anti-money laundering policies.
- The policies are promoted to employees, and are available on both the intranet and website. Employees are required to confirm that they have read these.
- For the public there is also a complaints procedure which can be accessed via the council website, plus an online form for reporting all types of suspected fraud.
- Under the partnership and delegation agreement, in 2019-20 LGSS provided a dedicated fraud team to investigate all alleged frauds perpetrated against the council. Responsibilities will transfer to the insourced internal audit team from April 2020.
- The council fully participates in the Cabinet Office's regular national fraud initiatives (NFI) and regularly reports the results to audit committee.

16. Ensuring an effective scrutiny function is in place:

- The council's scrutiny committee through its work programme regularly carries out work that involves reviewing the performance and effectiveness of other public service providers as well as the council. A member of the council's scrutiny committee is a member of the Norfolk health scrutiny committee and provides regular updates on their work to the council's scrutiny committee.
- A member of the council is also a member of the Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Board and inputs into the progression of the Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- A member of the council is also a member of the police and crime panel, and a member of the council's scrutiny committee is a member of the Norfolk community safety partnership scrutiny panel to provide regular updates on their work to the council's scrutiny committee. The council's chief executive also chairs the Norfolk Community Safety Partnership.



17. Ensuring that assurance arrangements conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit (2010) and, where they do not, explain why and how they deliver the same impact:

- In line with the partnership and delegation agreement, the internal audit for 2019-20 was provided by LGSS internal audit and was led by a professionally qualified head of internal audit in accordance with the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Public Service Organisations, Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the Local Government Application Note. Best practice standards will continue to be adhered to following the insourcing of the internal audit function from April 2020.

18. Undertaking the core functions of an audit committee, as identified in Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police (CIPFA, 2013):

- The council has an audit committee with terms of reference and supporting procedure rules covering internal and external audit, risk management, annual statement of accounts, corporate governance and internal control arrangements, and anti-fraud and corruption arrangements. The terms of reference were reviewed in October 2017 in line with the latest CIPFA guidance and can be found in article 17 of the council's constitution.

19. Ensuring that the authority provides timely support, information and responses to external auditors and properly considers audit findings and recommendations:

- The council provides support and information to the externally appointed auditors (Ernst & Young). Audit findings and recommendations are reported through the Audit Committee.

20. Incorporating good governance arrangements in respect of partnerships and other joint working and ensuring that they are reflected across the authority's overall governance structures:

- The council demonstrates a strong commitment to working in partnership with other agencies to deliver priority outcomes and ensure that this partnership activity provides value for money and added value.
- All key partnerships have been identified and are included in the partnership register. A corporate governance framework and toolkit has been developed for use by all key partnerships, to ensure that effective governance and risk management arrangements are in place.
- The governance arrangements for key partnerships are kept under review and the results are reported to cabinet annually, together with an assessment of the effectiveness of the council's involvement in partnerships
- Norwich Regeneration Limited (NRL) has a board consisting of two councillors, and three officers of the council. Two officers resigned from their positions on the board during 2019/20 and have not been replaced on the board. The council commenced recruitment for 2 independent non-executive directors during 2019/20 but interviews were delayed by the Covid19 situation and are now taking place in June 2020. The board combines a broad range of experience including finance, business case development, procurement, risk management as well as general management. The company appointed a full time managing director in 2018 who has significant commercial house building experience. NpLaw provide company



secretary support to the board. The board is provided additional expertise from various people including officers of the council, a financial advisor, a project manager, estate agents, architects and legal. The board has put in place a scheme of delegation to allow day to day decisions to be taken without the need for a full board meeting but major decisions are reserved for the board. NRL is taking a phased approach to development and all houses have been sold from its first development and NRL is now taking on further developments. NRL has a business plan in place which goes through rigorous scrutiny requiring the approval of the council as shareholder as well as the NRL board. Risks are managed at a company level through the business plan and board meetings while project risks are managed through the project process for each project.

Draft



5. Review of effectiveness

- 5.1. Norwich City 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 directors within the council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the head of internal audit's annual report, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.
- 5.2. The following is a brief description of the roles and processes that have been applied in evaluating the effectiveness of the governance framework:

1. The council and cabinet

- In February 2019 the council approved the new corporate plan 2019-2022, which is reviewed each year in line with the medium term financial strategy and in parallel to the development of the budget for the following year to ensure the necessary resources are in place for its delivery. This was updated in 2019 with changes to the key performance measures, which had been agreed by cabinet and the scrutiny committee. The council will continue to engage with stakeholders to inform the setting of corporate priorities beyond 2019-20, reflecting the changing landscape of local government finance and emerging opportunities and challenges for Norwich.
- The council approves medium term financial plans for the general fund and housing revenue account along with capital, investment and treasury management strategies. These provide the financial structure for the policy and budget framework, corporate planning, annual service planning and budget setting.
- During 2019-20 the cabinet continued with its approach to developing the future priorities and shape of the organisation to meet the council's savings requirements.
- Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires that every local authority shall make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and shall secure that one of their officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs. Council considered and delegated the decision to appoint a S151 & Chief Finance Officer to the Chief Executive and the Leader.
- Council considered the appointment of Independent Persons for the Council as per the standards framework to be compliant with the Localism act 2011.
- Following the decision made at full council, the Cabinet resolved to not participate in the Norfolk and Suffolk devolution agreement, with the process to establish an elected mayor and combined authority for the East Anglia region.
- Cabinet approved key strategies and policies such as the Procurement Strategy 2016-2020, and the Risk Management Policy. Cabinet approved that all appropriate mitigation had been taken for risks which exceeded the Councils risk appetite.



- Cabinet approved business plans, including joint ventures for NPS Norwich Limited, Norwich Norse Building Limited and Norwich Norse Environmental Limited, plus Norwich Regeneration Ltd and the Norwich and Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) strategic partnership.
- Quarterly performance monitoring reports are presented to scrutiny committee and cabinet – cabinet also receives budget monitoring reports. Performance monitoring reports during 2019-20 covered achievement against the council's detailed priority actions and performance measures detailed in the corporate plan 2019-22.
- The council's constitution working party recommends to cabinet and council any changes to the constitution.

2. The scrutiny committee

- The overview and scrutiny function is exercised by the scrutiny committee. Procedure rules and terms of reference include the general remit to maintain an overview of the discharge of the council's executive functions and the right to review council policies. Reviews also include delivery of the corporate plan, through performance reports.
- The statutory annual report on the work of scrutiny committee in 2018-19 was presented to scrutiny committee on 21 March 2019 and was presented to Council on 23 July 2019.

3. The audit committee

- The council has an audit committee with terms of reference which cover internal and external audit matters, risk management arrangements, corporate governance including internal control arrangements and the annual governance statement, anti-fraud and corruption arrangements, and the statement of accounts.
- The committee receives reports on corporate risks, the work of internal audit, including the head of internal audit's annual report, and external audit reports, letters and briefings. It also reviews and approves the annual governance statement.
- The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 introduced changes to the appointment process for external auditors. The committee reviewed options for appointing external auditors, and endorsed a recommendation to use PSAA Ltd, who was specified as the sector-led appointing body under the Local Audit (Appointing Person) Regulations 2015. This was recommended to cabinet and approved by full council.
- The committee reviewed counter fraud policies including anti-fraud and corruption, anti-money laundering, and whistleblowing. These were recommended and approved by cabinet.
- In line with good practice, the annual report on the work of the audit committee in 2018-19 was discussed by the audit committee on 11 June 2019 and presented to council on 23 July 2019.

4. The standards committee and monitoring officer

- The council has a standards committee with terms of reference to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members of the



council and to assist members and co-opted members to observe the council's code of conduct.

- The standards committee is supported by the monitoring officer, whose duties include the promotion of ethics and standards across the council, maintaining the constitution, and ensuring compliance with relevant laws, regulations and policies. The monitoring officer is a statutory appointment, and the current responsibilities of this role rest with the nominated officer from NpLaw.
- The monitoring officer's annual report supports the assurance statements included in the annual governance statement. It provides a review of the monitoring officer's work as part of the council's governance arrangements and system of internal control. The report covered the period up to 15 June 2019 and was presented to the Standards Committee on 2 July 2019. This concluded that the systems of internal control administered by the monitoring officer, including the code of corporate governance and the council's constitution, were adequate and effective during the period covered by this report for the purposes of the latest regulations.

5. Chief finance officer

- The chief finance officer is a statutory appointment, and during 2019-20 the responsibilities of this role were sourced through the agreement with LGSS. Duties include the proper administration of the financial affairs of the council, contributing to the effective leadership of the council as member of the corporate leadership team, ensuring that expenditure is lawful and within resources, advising on systems of internal financial control, and supporting the audit committee.
- Under the partnership and delegation agreement the council and LGSS work together to continually improve financial management practices and processes to deliver sound financial governance. This is evidenced by the fact that the external auditors issued unqualified audit opinions on the financial statements and value for money conclusion each year from 2012-13 to 2018-19.

6. Internal audit

- The Council takes assurance about the effectiveness of the governance environment from the work of Internal Audit, which provides independent and objective assurance across the whole range of the Council's activities. It is the duty of the head of internal audit to give an opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control within the Council. This opinion has been used to inform the Annual Governance Statement.
- The head of internal audit's annual report will be presented to the Audit Committee in July 2020. This report will outline the key findings of the audit work undertaken during 2019-20, including areas of significant weakness in the internal control environment.
- From the audit reviews undertaken during 2019-20, no areas were identified where it was considered that, if the risks highlighted materialised, it would have a major impact on the organisation as a whole. The need to improve risk management and some aspects of contract management were identified and audit reviews will continue to focus in this area. In each instance where it has been identified that the control environment was not strong enough, or was not complied with sufficiently to prevent risks to the organisation, internal audit has issued recommendations to further improve the system of control and compliance. Where these



recommendations are considered to have significant impact on the system of internal control, the implementation of actions is followed-up by internal audit and is reported to audit committee. The head of internal audit's opinion has stressed the need to address outstanding recommendations concerning contract management and Norwich Regeneration Ltd.

- It is the opinion of the head of internal audit that, taking into account all available evidence, satisfactory assurance may be awarded over the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's overall internal control environment during the financial year 2019-20. The detail to support this assessment is provided in the annual internal audit report.

7. Corporate governance group

- This is an internal officer group meeting every four months, which is chaired by the director of resources, and is responsible for reviewing all aspects of the council's governance arrangements. Other members of the group are the chief finance officer, monitoring officer, head of HR and learning, director of people and neighbourhoods and principal auditor.

8. Other explicit review / assurance mechanisms

External audit

- Under the government's local public audit regime the Audit Commission awarded contracts for work previously carried out by the Commission's own audit practice. As a result Ernst & Young (now EY) became the appointed external auditor from 1 September 2012.
- EY's audit results report (ISA260) for 2018-19 was presented to audit committee on 22 July 2019. The annual audit letter 2018-19 was presented to audit committee on 15 October 2019.
- For 2018-19 EY issued unqualified audit opinions on the financial statements, value for money conclusion and whole of government accounts. There were no significant risks identified other than a risk due to increasing commercialisation activity but concluded proper arrangements were in place for informed decision making.

Improvement and efficiency.

- The council has been on a significant journey of improvement over recent years which has been recognised by a number of awards including
 - The Gold award for "Delivering through efficiency" in the iESE improvement and efficiency awards 2013.
 - Highly commended in the Local Government Chronicle awards 2013 where we came second in the Most Improved Council of the Year category.
 - Gold award for overall "Council of the Year" in the iESE improvement and efficiency awards 2014.
 - Local Government Chronicle Award for "Most Improved Council" 2014.
 - Selected as a finalist in the MJ Local Government Achievement Awards 2015, for 'Best Achieving Council'.



- The council was also selected as a finalist in the Local Government Chronicle 'Council of the Year' award 2016.
- In addition, during 2015, iESE undertook a corporate health check of the council, and a review of efficiency was undertaken by Newton Europe, both with positive results
- Achieved silver standard status for the Council's Home Options service by the peer led, National Practitioner Support Service

The city council's housing development on Goldsmith Street won the RIBA Sterling Prize 2019.

6. Governance issues and actions

- We have been advised on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by the audit committee, and that the arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.
- The following is an outline of the significant issues arising from the review of effectiveness and the actions taken or proposed to deal with them (committee reports where mentioned, and minutes, can be found at www.norwich.gov.uk).

COVID-19

The Covid-19 situation that commenced in March 2020 has led to significant changes to the working practices for the council. As soon as the issue became apparent, the council put in place its business continuity/emergency planning procedures. A gold command structure was put in place with the chief executive chairing daily meetings and the director of strategy and culture leading the response. In response to the requirements of the government, council staff have been enabled to work at home as far as possible. The council has been able to maintain as far as possible a business as usual approach. However, additional requirements such as business rates grants and reliefs have seen additional pressures and staff have been redeployed where necessary to assist with additional workload. Internal audit work will focus on areas of heightened risk associated with these areas. HR have maintained information on staff who are working normally showing whether they are working at home or at their normal work location as well as staff who are shielding, off work with symptoms etc. The council has also formed a hub to distribute food and support vulnerable people who do not have any support network.

An evaluation of the effectiveness of business continuity/emergency planning will be needed across all service areas to evaluate the effectiveness of arrangements and identify any improvements that can be made for the future.

The financial impact on the council will be significant with lost revenue from car parking and potential non-payment of commercial rents, council tax and business rates the key risk areas. Finance have created monitoring information and modelling of scenarios to provide information to the Corporate Leadership Team. Cabinet councillors are regularly briefed on the ongoing situation and the impact on the council. Amendments have been made to the council's schedule of meetings to only hold meetings where necessary and to hold these remotely using



video technology. The planning committee has met remotely to delegate decisions to officers in the short term. Some government funding has been received but this falls well short of the anticipated loss of income in 2020/21. The medium term financial strategy will be reviewed during the year to address these issues.

The Council has developed a blueprint for recovery which was approved by Cabinet in June 2020. This will focus on helping the community to rebuild, support and protect the vulnerable whilst also developing the Council to transform its working practices and the ways in which its services are delivered and its assets are managed to benefit the community. The focus will be to build on opportunities arising from the pandemic to modernise the organisation and increase flexibility.

Joint Venture Insourcing

In October 2018 Cabinet endorsed the recommendation to continue negotiations with Norse for the return of the joint ventures to the full control of the council. In September 2019 the Cabinet authorised the termination of the environmental services contract by giving 18 months' notice as allowed in the contract meaning new service provision will start from April 2021. The services include major front facing services such as housing repairs and maintenance, street cleaning and grounds maintenance. A joint venture insourcing project involving officers from neighbourhood housing, city development, citywide services, finance and resources is in place to develop arrangements for the smooth transition of services underpinned by strong governance. This will continue to be a key focus for the council during 2020/21 to ensure that arrangements are in place for the first phase of insourcing from April 2021.

In addition to this work, the council will continue to address internal audit recommendations arising from their review of Norwich Regeneration Ltd. These findings will also inform the setup of robust governance arrangements being put in place in respect of the joint venture insourcing project.

Risk Management

Whilst the Council has in place an established strategy and policy that conforms to best practice, the need to improve the application of these processes has been identified to ensure that risk management is operating effectively at every level of its operations. Internal audit will assist services and the corporate leadership team to make improvements and develop a fluid and systematic approach to managing risk at both corporate and service levels.

Emerging legislation

- New Financial Management Code from CIPFA will take effect in full from April 2021.
- In March 2020 the government released 'Planning for the Future' ahead of two proposed white papers originally due in respect of Planning and Social Housing.
- Environmental bill 2020
- Domestic Abuse bill 2020



7. Conclusion

Based on the work that has been completed, assurance can be taken that the governance arrangements at Norwich City Council are fit for purpose.

Norwich City Council is committed to ensuring the implementation of all actions that are planned to strengthen the organisation's governance arrangements. Implementation of these actions will be monitored through the next annual review.

Draft



8. Statement by Leader of the Council and Chief Executive

The Council has in place strong governance arrangements which we are confident protect its interests and provide necessary assurances to our citizens and stakeholders.

We propose over the coming year to continually address any issues arising that need addressing in order to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation not only as part of our next annual review, but also continuously throughout the year.

Signed:

.....
Alan Waters
Leader of the Council

.....
Stephen Evans
Chief Executive

Date:

Date: