

Report of:	Head of Governance
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Portfolio Leader:	Leader of the Council
Key Decision:	No
Report Track:	Council: 08/07/15

COUNCIL
8 JULY, 2015
ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2014-15

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present to Council for approval the Annual Governance Statement for 2014-15 as considered by the Audit & Governance Committee on 23 June 2015.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Council approves the Annual Governance Statement for 2014-15.

3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011, the Council has undertaken its annual review of the effectiveness of its system of internal control and prepared an Annual Governance Statement (AGS).
- 3.2 On 23 June, 2015, the Annual Governance Statement was considered by the Audit & Governance Committee. The Committee were satisfied with the AGS and recommended that it be forwarded to Council for approval.
- 3.3 A copy of the Annual Governance Statement for 2014-15 is attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.4 Following approval of the Annual Governance Statement it should be signed by the most senior officer and the most senior Member of the Council i.e. the Managing Director and the Leader of the Council.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The Council's corporate governance arrangements and internal control framework cuts across all corporate priorities.

5 Report Detail

- 5.1 On 23 June, 2015, the Audit & Governance Committee considered a number of reports which support the production of the Annual Governance Statement, i.e.:
- the Strategic Risk Register;
 - the Review of the Effectiveness of Internal Audit; and
 - the Annual Internal Audit Report
- 5.2 Having discussed and noted these reports and the supporting information provided with the report on the Annual Governance Statement, the Audit & Governance Committee recommend to Council the approval of the Annual Governance Statement 2014-15.
- 5.3 The Annual Governance Statement 2014-15 represents the outcome of the annual review of the Council's system of internal control and governance arrangements. It details a number of significant issues which need to be addressed. Progress in addressing these issues will be monitored and reported to the Audit & Governance Committee.
- 5.4 The Annual Governance Statement will accompany the Council's Statement of Accounts in due course.

6 Implications**6.1 Financial**

None

6.2 Legal

None

6.3 Human Resources

None

6.4 Section 17 (Crime Prevention)

None

6.5 Human Rights Act

None

6.6 Data Protection

None

6.7 Risk Management

None

6.8 Equality & Diversity

None

6.9 Best Value

None

7 Appendices to the Report

Appendix 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2014-15

Previous Consideration

Audit & Governance Committee 23 June, 2015

Background Papers

Annual Internal Audit Report 2014-15
Strategic Risk Register
Heads of Service Assurance Statements for 2014-15
Statutory Officers Assurance Statements for 2014-15

**CANNOCK CHASE DISTRICT COUNCIL
ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT FOR 2014-15**

1. Scope of Responsibility

- 1.1 Cannock Chase District Council (the 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.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 The Council has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*. This statement explains how the Council has complied with the code and also meets the requirements of Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011, regulation 4(3), which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an annual governance statement.

2. The Purpose of the Governance Framework

- 2.1 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values by which the authority is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads its communities. It enables the authority 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 the 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 the Council for the year ended 31 March 2015 and up to the date of approval of the Annual Governance Statement.

3. The Governance Framework

- 3.1 The 6 key principles of good governance together with the key elements of the systems and processes that supports these principles and an assessment of their adequacy is outlined below.

1. Focusing on the purpose of the authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area

- The Council's vision and the intended outcomes for citizens and service users are outlined in the Corporate Plan. The Council's vision and its priorities are reviewed annually. The Council's priorities are approved following consultation and incorporated into the Corporate Plan and the Community Strategy, and reflect the Council's role in delivering the priorities set out in the Community Strategy.
- The Council has a performance management framework to ensure delivery of the corporate priorities. The priorities are cascaded through the authority via the Corporate Plan, the Priority Delivery Plans (which include Portfolio Delivery Plans), Delivering Change, service delivery plans and employees' personal development reviews.
- Forward-looking targets and performance indicators are established and monitored on a regular basis. Leadership Team, Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committee receive quarterly performance reports. They monitor and scrutinise the performance of services and the achievement of targets. Heads of Service and Service Managers are held to account for the performance of their service areas. A range of Policy Development Committees also assist in supporting the performance monitoring of Priority Delivery Plans. The Committees also review specific policy areas and explore community issues. Performance is also managed through service business plans and individual employee personal development reviews.
- The Council's budget is aligned to the Council's aims and objectives. The Council has a comprehensive budget strategy, medium term financial plan and robust budget monitoring process, which provides sound financial management and regular reporting of financial management information for both revenue and capital budgets.
- The Council has a number of mechanisms in place to ensure the economical, effective and efficient use of resources, and for securing continuous improvement in the way in which its services are delivered:
 - Continuous improvement is driven via the Corporate Plan, the Priority Delivery Plans and the Council's performance management framework. This provides monitoring reports to Leadership Team, Cabinet, the Scrutiny Committee and the Policy Development Committees;
 - The Council's Delivering Change process enables resources to be re-directed to meet Council priorities and requires services to identify and deliver year-on-year efficiency savings.
 - The Council has appropriate mechanisms (ie Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules) in place to ensure that value for money is achieved through the procurement of goods and services.
 - From time to time, services are tested against other authorities using national benchmarking exercises, which include VFM comparators.
- Appropriate governance arrangements are put in place for each partnership eg the LSP. Service Level Agreements have been put in place to ensure adequate governance of the 7 services which are shared with Stafford Borough Council.

2. Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles

- The Council operates under the Leader and Cabinet model. The Council's Constitution defines the roles and responsibilities of the executive, non-executive, scrutiny and officer functions. The Constitution sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. It includes the Scheme of Delegation which identifies those areas of decision-making and day-to-day operations that have been delegated to Senior Officers and those matters reserved for Members.
- There is a Protocol for Officer / Member relations as part of the Constitution to assist in defining the separate roles and aid appropriate communication.
- The Council has 3 statutory officers in place:
 - Head of Paid Service – the Chief Executive – overall responsibility for the day-to-day management of the Council
 - The s151 Officer – the Head of Finance – has overall responsibility for for the proper administration of the council's financial affairs and ensuring that public money is safeguarded at all times. The council's financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010) in that:
 - he is actively involved in, and able to bring influence to bear on, all material business decisions to ensure immediate and longer term implications, opportunities and risks are fully considered, and alignment with the council's financial strategy;
 - he is a member of the Leadership Team, helping it to develop and implement strategy and to resource and deliver the council's strategic objectives sustainably and in the public interest;
 - he leads the promotion and delivery by the whole organisation of good financial management so that public money is safeguarded at all times and used appropriately, economically, efficiently and effectively; and
 - The Head of Finance ensures that there is a robust financial framework and medium term financial strategy in place.

In delivering these responsibilities he directs a finance function that is resourced to be fit for purpose and includes staff that are professionally qualified and experienced.
 - The Monitoring Officer - the Head of Law & Administration at SBC has been appointed as the Monitoring Officer and is responsible to the authority for ensuring that agreed procedures are followed and that all applicable statutes, regulations are complied with. The Council also has in place a protocol to define the role of the Monitoring Officer. He reports to the Council, Executive and Committees with legal implications being referred to the Legal Shared Service, which employs qualified and experienced staff.
- A corporate Leadership Team which includes the 3 statutory officers is in place to support the Cabinet, the Scrutiny Committee and the Policy Development Committees, and to manage operational services.
- Members allowances are dealt with by an independent panel. The Council's Pay Policy details the arrangements for paying employees. Chief Officers' salaries have been determined through a Hay Evaluation process and other employees grades are determined through the job evaluation process / Single Status agreement.

3. Promoting values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour

- There are Codes of Conduct in place for Members and Employees. The Codes of Conduct have been approved and adopted by the Council and are available to all members and officers as part of the Constitution.
- The Codes of Conduct require Members and employees to declare specified outside interests, which could influence decision making.
- Any complaints about Members' conduct are dealt with by the Standards Committee. A procedure for handling complaints has been approved by Council. Complaints about employees conduct can be initiated through various mechanisms.
- Training is offered to Members annually on the Code and whenever changes are made to it. Employees are given a copy of the Code of Conduct as part of their induction process.
- The Council's values are in the process of being updated and will be finalised as part of the Corporate Plan for 2015-16 onwards.

4. Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk

- There is a Scrutiny Committee and a Health Scrutiny Committee in place to monitor and challenge the performance of the Council and partner organisations where appropriate. There is a Call-in process in place to challenge where appropriate decisions made by Cabinet.
- There is an Audit & Governance Committee in place, which is independent of the Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committee. The Committee's remit is to provide independent assurance on the adequacy of the risk management framework and the associated control environment. The Committee meets the key requirements of the CIPFA guidance on Audit Committees.
- Reports are prepared for the Cabinet which include all relevant information. All reports are consulted on with appropriate financial and legal officers and are accompanied by a comprehensive checklist signed off by the reports author. All reports that involve expenditure fully evaluate the financial implications of the proposal with any associated risks. Committee reports and minutes show reasons for decisions made.
- The Monitoring Officer ensures compliance with existing laws, regulations and established policies and procedures and is aware of and acts upon proposed changes to legislation. The Monitoring Officer will report to the full Council if they consider that any proposal, decision or omission would give rise to unlawfulness or maladministration. Such a report will have the effect of stopping the process or decision being implemented until the report has been considered. A solicitor attends all of the Council's main committee meetings.
- The Head of Finance ensures that the financial management of the Council is conducted in accordance with the Financial Regulations set out in the Constitution and that expenditure is lawful. The Head of Finance, with the assistance of the Internal Audit section, ensures the legality of financial transactions and compliance with Financial Regulations.
- There is a risk management policy and strategy in place. This provides for:-
 - the identification, prioritisation and control of strategic risks
 - monitoring of risk management action plans by the Leadership Team
 - regular reports to the Audit & Governance Committee on the progress in managing strategic risks; and
 - risk management implications are included in committee reports.

- There is a system of internal control in place. At the core of this is the Council's various policies, regulations and procedures eg Financial Regulations, Contract Procedure Rules, HR Policies, etc.
- Internal Audit review systems and their controls to provide assurance and recommendations for improvement. This work includes ensuring compliance with policies, procedures, laws and regulations. Internal Audit operates to an annual audit plan which is based on an assessment of risk to ensure that the areas of highest risk are reviewed.
- The Section 151 officer with the support of Internal Audit ensures that there are adequate financial control mechanisms in place to safeguard the Council's assets.
- The Council has in place a Confidential Reporting policy. The policy allows anyone to report concerns in confidence and not just employees. The Anti-Fraud & Corruption Policy includes a Fraud Response Plan and a Prosecution Policy. Procedures are in place for receiving and investigating complaints received.

5. Developing the capacity and capability of members and officers to be effective

Members:

- A formal Induction programme for Members takes place after each District Council election;
- In-house training is provided as and when necessary. Members attend external courses and conferences as appropriate.
- Members tend to assess their own skills and identify where training is required. For new issues, training is offered to Members as appropriate

Employees:

- Council services are provided by trained and experienced people. All posts have a detailed job description and person specification. Rigorous recruitment processes are in place followed up by induction training and on going training and development.
- Although no longer formally accredited through Investors in People the Council continues to maintain a comprehensive framework to ensure that it's employees are adequately trained, this includes:
 - An Induction Programme is in place;
 - The development needs of employees are identified annually through the Personal Development Review process;
 - The Training Officer identifies courses where appropriate for common skills gaps;
 - Career development is encouraged through the Personal Development Reviews and opportunities provided for training, mentoring, secondments. There are development graded posts for trainees in certain professions; and
 - A competency framework is in place and this outlines the knowledge and skills expected of the Council's managers.

6. Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust local public accountability

- The Council's Communications Strategy puts in place a variety of mechanisms to communicate with the community and other stakeholders. These include the Council's website, Chase Matters, Community Forums, specific groups, the Housing Hometalk magazine and the use of Social Media.

- The authority is open and accessible to the community, service users and its employees. The Council is accessible via the Contact Centre, Reception, website. Engagement with the Community and stakeholders takes place through a variety of mechanisms:
 - Community Forums
 - Website
 - Social Media
 - Consultation Panel
 - Some specialist community groups in place eg for the disabled
- The Council is committed to openness and transparency in all its dealings, subject only to the need to preserve confidentiality in those specific circumstances where it is proper and appropriate to do so. Meetings are held in public except where confidential issues are discussed and the law permits private meetings. The Council complies with the guidelines on publishing transparent data.

3.2 As part of a senior management restructure the Chief Executive was made redundant in January 2015. A new post of Managing Director was created and the postholder has taken on the responsibilities of Chief Executive as referred to in the Governance Framework outlined above and elsewhere in this statement.

3.3 A key element of the Council's governance arrangements concerns safeguarding. Cannock Chase Borough Council has both a moral and legal obligation to ensure a duty of care for children and vulnerable adults across its services.

We are committed to ensuring that all children and vulnerable adults are protected and kept safe from harm whilst engaged in services organised and provided by the Council. We do this by:

- Having a Child & Adult Protection Policy and procedure in place endorsed by the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board and Staffordshire and Stoke Adult Safeguarding Partnership
- Having child & adult protection processes which give clear, step-by-step guidance if abuse is identified
- Safeguarding training programme in place for staff and members
- Carrying out the appropriate level of DBS checks on staff and volunteers
- Working closely with Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board & Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Adult Safeguarding Partnership

4. Review of effectiveness

4.1 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 executive managers within the authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Chief Internal Auditor's annual report, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates. The process that has been applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework is set out below.

4.2 **The Audit & Governance Committee** - monitors the effectiveness of risk management, reviews corporate governance issues, the work of Internal Audit and the anti fraud & corruption arrangements throughout the year.

4.3 **Internal Audit** – is responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of the Council's system of internal control and reporting on its adequacy. Internal Audit is a key source of assurance for the Annual Governance Statement and as such it is essential that the Internal Audit function operates in accordance with best practice:

- (i) Internal Audit operates in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.
- (ii) A review of the effectiveness of internal audit has been undertaken. This review has been undertaken via a self-assessment and a review by the Head of Governance. The review concluded that the system of internal audit is operating effectively and assurance can be taken from the work of Internal Audit.

Internal Audit reviews the internal control system following an audit plan based on an assessment of the potential risks for the various systems and procedures. The work undertaken on the annual audit plan for 2014-15 has been used to provide an independent view on the adequacy of the governance framework.

In their annual report to the Audit & Governance Committee, the Internal Audit section has independently assessed the Council's internal control environment as being satisfactory overall based on their work during the year. Internal Audit has identified the following issues for inclusion in the Annual Governance Statement:

- (i) Information Governance – whilst the Council has arrangements in place for key aspects of this (eg Data Protection, Freedom of Information and IT Security), there is a need to review these arrangements and develop them under the umbrella of an information governance framework. In order to give clarity to roles and responsibilities and to adopt a more pro-active stance, a member of Leadership Team needs to be identified as the Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO). Further work needs to be done on embedding and raising awareness of the IT Security Policy and the IT Strategy needs to be finalised and implemented.

(ii) Code of Governance – a review has been undertaken of the existing Code against the CIPFA/IFAC “Good Governance in the Public Sector” framework. This review concluded that whilst there is governance framework in place this does not meet in full the new requirements as there has been a shift in emphasis. There is now more emphasis on:

- Upholding ethical standards;
- Information Governance and openness & transparency;
- Checking the effectiveness of governance arrangements as opposed to compliance.

Where deficiencies in internal control were identified during reviews, assurance was provided that these had been or would be resolved in an appropriate manner. Such cases will continue to be followed-up as part of the routine operation of the Internal Audit function.

4.4 External Audit / Other Review Agencies - during the year the Council received the following key reports:

- (i) Audit Findings (dated 12 September 2014 and reported to Audit & Governance Committee 23 September 2014); and
- (ii) Annual Audit Letter (dated 22 October and reported to Audit & Governance Committee 18 November 2014).

The reports offered an unqualified opinion on the Council’s financial statements and its arrangements for value for money and effective use of resources. No significant concerns were identified.

4.6 Risk Management - during 2014/15 the Audit & Governance Committee received regular progress reports regarding the management of strategic risks. The strategic risk management process has been successful in reducing 1 red risk to an amber risk during the year.

There are currently no red risks for inclusion as significant governance issues. Two Amber Risks have been identified for inclusion through other assurance sources and are attributed accordingly.

4.7 Statements of Assurance from Heads of Service - assurances were sought from the Heads of Service as to the effectiveness of a number of aspects of the Governance Framework as it operates in their service areas. No significant governance issues have been identified.

4.8 Statements of Assurance from the Statutory Officers - assurances have been sought from the Head of Paid Service (ie Chief Executive), the Monitoring Officer (Head of Law & Administration at SBC) and the s151 Officer (Head of Finance) with regard to their responsibilities for governance. The following have been identified as significant governance issues:

- Budgetary issues relating to reductions in public expenditure
- Impact of Welfare Reform
- Capacity of Management

4.9 **Leadership Team** – in addition to the individual Heads of Service and Statutory Officers assurances, the members of Leadership Team have been consulted on the draft annual governance statement and the significant governance issues that should be included within it.

4.10 We have been advised on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by the Audit & Governance Committee and that the arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework. The areas already address and those to be specifically addressed with new actions are outlined below.

5. Significant Governance Issues

5.1 All significant governance issues are included in the action plan below.

ISSUE	OFFICER RESPONSIBLE	TARGET DATE
Outstanding and Ongoing items from previous AGS		
Constitution - the review of the Constitution to reflect changes and best practice has not yet been completed. The work has been completed and is due to be approved by Council in August 2015.	Head of Law & Administration (Stafford Borough Council)	August 2015
Contract Procedure Rules & Financial Regulations - the work in reviewing and updating the Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations is nearing completion. Training needs to be provided to support the launch of the new documents.	Legal Services Manager and Head of Finance	September 2015
Code of Governance – this is out of date (due to changes in the senior management structure) and in need of review to reflect recent updated guidance.	Head of Governance	January 2016
Employees' Code of Conduct – this has not been reviewed for some years and needs to be updated	Head of Human Resources, Head of Law & Administration and Head of Governance	March 2016

ISSUE	OFFICER RESPONSIBLE	TARGET DATE
<p>Key Management & Supervisory Controls – review to be undertaken with Leadership Team and service managers of all key supervisory/ management controls and key projects/significant pieces of work to consider their effectiveness, priority etc and ensure adequate resources are available to deliver them</p>	Leadership Team	Throughout 2015/16
<p>Public Service Reductions in the district of Cannock Chase - actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • active approach to consultation on service changes; • negotiation on proposals; • understanding and identifying the impact across the district as a whole; and • working more closely with partners 	Managing Director	Ongoing
Issues for 2015/16		
<p>Welfare Reforms – managing the transition from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit (UC), which is due to commence in October 2015.</p> <p>Agreement to be reached with the Department of Work and Pensions, subject to funding, on the provision of assistance to claimants regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Budgeting Skills (UC is paid directly to the claimant (whereas Housing Benefit is often paid to the landlord). • Access to IT facilities and skills (UC is expected to be claimed online). <p>Assistance with the claim process for the claimants that need the most support.</p>	Head of Finance	Ongoing

ISSUE	OFFICER RESPONSIBLE	TARGET DATE
<p>Budgetary Issues – arising from the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR).</p> <p>Work will continue to prepare for the future with regard to identifying the level of resources likely to be available to the Council and in particular the impact of ongoing reductions in public expenditure.</p>	<p>Managing Director and Head of Finance</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Information Governance – an information governance framework is to be established under the direction of a nominated SIRO. This will include a review of the existing arrangements for Data Protection, Freedom of Information, IT Security and the IT Strategy.</p>	<p>Head of Environmental Health</p> <p>Head of Technology</p>	<p>March 2016</p>
<p>Capacity of Management due to reductions needed to meet financial savings – this will be managed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that all priorities in the Priority Delivery Plans are resourced appropriately; • where necessary, considering whether resources from other parts of the Council can be transferred for a period; • Leadership Tem maintaining an overview of performance through “managing the business” performance indicators; • Requests for additional projects may be refused or deferred until subsequent year(s). 	<p>Managing Director</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters 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 as part of our next annual review.

Signed:

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Leader of the Council

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Date

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Managing Director

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Date

on behalf of Cannock Chase District Council