

Corporate Risk Management

Annual Report 2020/21

Background

1. Risk management is “the identification, analysis and economic control of opportunities and risks that challenge the assets, reputation and objectives of an organisation.”
2. Risk management enables the Council to effectively manage strategic decision making, service planning and delivery both to safeguard the well being of its stakeholders and increase the likelihood of achieving objectives. The aim is to manage risks that cannot be economically eliminated or transferred.
3. Effective risk management, which is integrated into policies and procedures, is an essential element of a sound internal control system and therefore necessary if the Council is to demonstrate that it has good systems of Corporate Governance. It also provides evidence to inform the Annual Governance Statement, which is reviewed annually and accompanies the Statement of Accounts.

Current Position

4. The structures and processes, which are employed within the Council to manage risk, are described below.
5. The Chief Executive and the Corporate Management Team are essential to the embedding of risk management within the Council by promoting a culture of risk management being practised throughout the organisation as an integral part of normal activities and fostering the sharing of best practice between Groups and Services.
6. Under the Council's Constitution, the Strategic Director, Resources and Digital has responsibility for Risk Management, and the key rules in relation to Risk Management are set out in Financial Regulation 17.
7. Strategic and Service Directors who have ownership for the management of operational risks which impact on their Service(s), are required to incorporate risk management principles into the service planning process and ensure that the risk management process is embedded in all operations, major projects, partnership working, arrangements with key suppliers and change management initiatives.
8. All managers are required to understand risk and its potential impact on the achievement of the Council's targets and objectives and be able to anticipate, assess and manage risks that relate to their areas of responsibility.
9. The role of the Corporate Risk Management function is to:
 - Formulate strategies to manage the corporate risk process;
 - Develop, implement, monitor and review an action plan to minimise corporate strategic risks;

- Support and develop Service Risk Management Co-ordinators through the Corporate Risk and Resilience Group;
 - Co-ordinate risk management and business continuity planning activity through the Corporate Risk and Resilience Group;
 - Review Service risk management action plans for relevance and consistency;
 - Monitor implementation of Service risk management plans;
 - Report to the Audit and Standards Committee, and
 - Co-ordinate risk management activity, ensuring that it is joined up with business continuity management, emergency and resilience planning.
10. The Corporate Risk Management Team, which is an integral part of the Council's Resources and Digital Group, co-ordinates risk management activity and delivers technical support, advice, guidance and training to all Groups and Services either directly or via Service Risk Management Co-ordinators.
 11. Each Group has a Risk Co-ordinator. The role of the Group Risk Co-ordinator is to act as a risk management champion within the Group, providing guidance and support to service managers in the administration of risk management activities in addition to acting as the channel of communication between the Corporate Risk Management function and the Group Management Team.
 12. The principal forum for risk management development is the Corporate Risk and Resilience Group, which consists of the Corporate Risk Management Team, Group Risk Co-ordinators and a representative of the Council's Emergency and Resilience Planning, IT and Health & Safety functions.
 13. The role of the Corporate Risk and Resilience Group with regards to risk management is to:
 - Engage with Strategic Groups in relation to risk management and resilience to ensure it is consistently updated and embedded throughout the Council and within governance arrangements.
 - Identify opportunities for improvements and best practice in relation to risk management and resilience.
 - Co-ordinate and oversee the implementation and embedding of identified changes and improvements.
 14. The Council's Internal Audit Service assists in the risk management process by reviewing risk management systems and verifying compliance by Services direct to the Strategic Director, Resources and Digital and the Audit and Standards Committee. In addition, risks are identified in the execution of the annual audit plan, which are fed into the relevant risk action plans.
 15. The Corporate Risk Management structure is set out in diagrammatical form at Appendix 2.

Developments in 2020/21

16. As part of the ongoing work to refresh operational risk management, Service Directors and Service Risk Coordinators have been supported where requested by the Corporate Risk Management Team. Aligning operational risk management to Service objectives will assist with focussing risk management activity on Council priorities and achievement of key outcomes.

17. The fulfilment of the Council's responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, requires that the organisation has a sound business continuity planning framework at the heart of which is the Business Continuity Planning Policy approved by Council in October 2008. The existing Policy was reviewed and approved by Cabinet in June 2013 and last updated in 2018/19 to reflect organisational changes.
18. To support the Council's response to COVID-19 and provide a joined up approach to the identification, assessment, mitigation and management of the numerous risks that emerged as a consequence of the pandemic which could threaten the achievement of the Council's policy objectives the following processes were undertaken:
 - Services reviewed BIAs and BCPs prior to lockdown with COVID-19 planning assumptions applied to ensure they were fit to minimise business interruptions in this scenario, and the required skills and equipment would be available. IT used this to prioritise allocation of IT equipment and support. An employee skills questionnaire was also drafted and circulated to enable staff redeployment to support critical activities.
 - This process was revisited in April 2020 to identify those activities where delivery might be interrupted with a critical impact to ensure appropriate BCPs were compiled and the necessary resources were allocated. This was repeated in November 2020 to reflect escalating COVID infections, seasonal service pressures and pending exit from the European Union, to ensure necessary resilience was in place to avoid any interruptions to critical Council activities, including those related to COVID response.
 - COVID-19 specific business risks were identified and circulated for review via Risk Champions to all Service Directors, to obtain and provide assurance that risks to delivery of Council objectives as result of COVID were identified and effectively mitigated.
19. The Corporate Management Team has continued to ensure strategic risks are responded to in accordance with the Risk Management Policy, with risks and controls being recorded for inclusion within the Strategic Risk Register. In November 2018 Cabinet and Council approved a revised Strategic Risk Register which is monitored and reported updates presented quarterly. The latest Strategic Risk Register can be seen in Appendix 3.
20. The Audit and Standards Committee have received quarterly risk management reports and risk management training is available for councillors.

How well has the Council managed Risk?

21. The overall risk management structure which is reviewed annually, as outlined in paragraphs 4 to 15 and shown at Appendix 2, provides a joined-up approach to the identification, assessment, mitigation and management of the numerous risks which could threaten the achievement of the Council's policy objectives.
22. Progress has been made against the risk management developmental objectives for 2020/21 identified in the Corporate Risk Management Annual Report 2019/20 as shown at Appendix 4.

23. The Council has in place a formalised business continuity framework to mitigate key risks for all services and a Corporate Continuity Plan, which can facilitate the prioritisation of action in response to a large scale event without inhibiting any response to Emergency Response Arrangements should the event be related to a civil emergency. This supports the Council's resilience planning to meet the requirements of the Civil Contingences Act 2004.
24. The Council responded effectively to the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic and through comprehensive mitigation and planning suffered no major interruptions to key services in 2020/21, which further demonstrates how corporate risk management arrangements support service delivery.

Development Objectives 2021/22

25. Development objectives for 2021/22 are set out in Appendix 5.

Conclusion

26. This report outlines the arrangements for managing risk within the Council, their effectiveness and the steps, which are being taken to ensure continuous improvement of the function and minimisation of loss.
27. On the basis of these arrangements and evidence of their operation it can be concluded that arrangements for managing risk within the Council are effective.