

Gateshead Council and Group

Annual Governance Statement 2020/21

Scope of Responsibility

- 1 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.
- 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.
- 3 The Council has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government:Framework*. A copy of the Code is on the Council's website at:

<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/3696/Local-Code-of-Governance>
- 4 This statement explains how the Council and Group has complied with the Code and also meets the requirements of regulation 6(1) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

The Purpose of the Governance Framework

- 5 The Governance Framework comprises the systems, processes, culture and values by which the Council is directed and controlled and through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. 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 and cost-effective services. Good governance combines robust systems and processes, such as risk management, financial management, performance management and internal controls, with effective leadership based on openness and strong ethical standards to create a culture that underpins the delivery of the Council's strategic approach, Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives.
- 6 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 impact of those risks being realised and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.
- 7 The Governance Framework has been in place at the Council for the year ended 31 March 2021 and approval of the Statement of Accounts 2020/21.

The Governance Framework

- 8 The Council continually reviews and improves its Governance Framework and during 2020/21, it has been updated to take account of changes to the Council's performance management framework which was being reviewed during the year and will be implemented in 2021/22.
- 9 The Council continues to face a number of challenges managing significant budgetary pressures, whilst meeting increasing demand as a consequence of demographic changes and a rapidly changing policy context, including the current and ongoing impacts resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, which will require effective long term planning to ensure a review of lessons learned, an effective recovery and mitigation of the financial impacts. It is anticipated that the scale and depth of these changes will continue until at least 2022, so the Council needs to ensure it can adapt with pace and purpose to continue to provide the best possible services to its residents.

Organisational Structures

- 10 The Council's objectives are set out in the strategic approach, Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives, which provides a framework to deliver the priorities of the Council's Thrive policy and Health and Wellbeing Strategy using the three pillars of the Strategic Vision:

- Economic Strategy
- Housing Strategy
- Investment Strategy

alongside interventions and actions required to fulfil the Council's Climate Emergency response and Community Wealth Building.

- 11 These priorities are translated by Services into specific aims and objectives. The achievement of these objectives is monitored by individual services and at a strategic level by the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- 12 The Council has a corporate suite of strategic performance indicators to enable effective monitoring of the Council's strategic approach through which quality of service is measured via strategic outcome indicators. SMG Services and Performance plays a key role in monitoring the Performance Framework before reports are presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet on a six monthly basis. The Corporate Data Management Group is overseeing the development of an approach to improving how the performance information is presented so that this is accessible to all stakeholders. Performance reports to Overview and Scrutiny are published on the Council's website.
- 13 The Localism Act, 2011 introduced a duty on Councils to promote and maintain high standards of behaviour by members of the Council. While the Act removed the requirement to have a Standards Committee, the Council has set up a politically balanced Committee to deal with any such issues and this was combined with the Audit Committee during 2014/15 as part of the changes to the decision making structures.

Employees are also subject to a Code of Conduct and a number of specific policies as set out in the Employee Handbook.

- 14 Policy and decision making are facilitated by a clear framework of delegation set out in the Council's Constitution. This sets out, among other things, where responsibility lies for developing and delivering policy, and for taking decisions. The Constitution provides for extensive delegation to officers but within a policy framework laid down by the Council, and with the more significant executive decisions being taken by the Leader and Cabinet. The Constitution is subject to an annual review which ensures it is up to date in terms of changes to Council policy, revised delegations and legislative changes.
- 15 Risk management is embedded in the Council through a Corporate Risk Management Policy which includes the requirement to identify strategic and operational risks, assess those risks for likelihood and impact, identify mitigating controls and allocate responsibility for those controls. The Council maintains and reviews a register of its business risks, linking them to strategic business objectives and assigning ownership for each risk. The Audit and Standards Committee receives quarterly reports on risk management and takes appropriate action to ensure that corporate business risks are being actively managed; the Committee also receives the annual corporate risk management report and agrees the effectiveness of the Council's risk management arrangements.
- 16 The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital is designated as the responsible officer for the administration of the Council's financial affairs under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972. This includes ensuring the lawfulness and financial prudence of decision-making; providing advice, particularly on financial impropriety and budget issues; giving financial information; and acting as the Council's money laundering reporting officer. It also extends to ensuring the financial arrangements in place conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government.
- 17 The Audit and Standards Committee reviews and approves the Council's Local Code of Governance; the original code was reviewed by the Audit and Standards Committees and approved by the full Council following referral from the Cabinet. The terms of reference for the Audit and Standards Committee state it will "*consider the effectiveness of the Council's risk management arrangements, the internal control environment and associated anti-fraud and anti-corruption arrangements*". The Committee reviews internal control and governance issues relating to the Council and submits an annual report to the Cabinet and Council, based on its activity over the year including the approval of the Annual Governance Statement.
- 18 Compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations is ensured by the requirement in the Constitution to give the Chief Executive, the Monitoring Officer and the Chief Finance Officer the opportunity to comment on every report submitted to a decision-making body. The Monitoring Officer has a legal duty to ensure the lawfulness and fairness of decision-making. This includes acting as the Council's Senior Information Risk Owner with overall responsibility for the Council's Information Governance procedures.

- 19 The Council maintains an independent Internal Audit Service. The Internal Audit Service is required to objectively examine, evaluate and report upon the adequacy of the control environment as a contribution to the proper, economic, efficient and effective use of the Council's resources. This is achieved through the delivery of a risk based annual audit plan which is agreed by the Audit and Standards Committee and monitored on a quarterly basis. The Chief Internal Auditor also prepares an annual report based on the work of the Internal Audit Service which provides an independent and objective opinion on the Council's control environment based on the work undertaken by the Service throughout the year. During 2019/20, the Internal Audit Service was externally assessed for compliance with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The outcome of the assessment was that the service is substantially compliant with the requirement of PSIAS and the CIPFA Application Note. There were some minor areas for continued improvement identified. All the areas were included in an action plan, progress against which is reported to the Audit and Standards Committee. The results of the assessment were reported to the Audit and Standards Committee in June 2020.
- 20 The Council is committed to the training and development of all its councillors. All councillors are encouraged to take the opportunity to draw up a Personal Development Plan (PDP) which is monitored on an annual basis. The PDP helps to identify areas where individuals would like extra training or development. Councillors are also encouraged to attend training courses on specific issues including Ethics and Probity and Risk Management. In addition, a development pool has been established into which councillors can nominate themselves, to further develop their chairing skills. The Council has for many years, provided an induction programme for new councillors, giving the opportunity to meet with the Chief Executive and senior officers of the Council. The aim of the programme is to give an insight into how the Council works and the different services it provides to residents.
- 21 A Corporate Partnership Register is maintained which is updated by Strategic/Service Directors in a timely manner and then reviewed on an annual basis. A guidance document is available to Strategic/Service Directors to support the maintenance of the register. Examples of partnerships on the register include the Gateshead Health and Care System, Gateshead Safeguarding Children Partnership, Health and Wellbeing Board and the South Tyne & Wear Waste Management Partnership. A risk assessment model has been developed to assess the strength of each partnership arrangement in respect of governance, financial arrangements, reputation and delivery. The most significant partnerships to the Council have been identified from the Partnership Register and risk assessments have been completed by the relevant Strategic/Service Director for each of these.
- 22 The Gateshead Housing Company, the Council's arms length management organisation, is responsible for managing Council housing stock on behalf of the Council. They play a significant role in delivering the Council's priority outcomes. The Council and Housing Company share most core systems of control including the finance system, and their internal audit services are provided by the Council. The Company has its own Board, Audit Committee and Strategic Risk Register. The main features of their governance and internal control arrangements are assessed each year and reported to the Company's Resources, Audit and Performance Committee by way of a Report of the Managing Director on the Statement of Internal Control, and their

accounts have been consolidated into the Council's group accounts on a line by line basis.

- 23 Following a decision to transfer the housing function to the Council, the Housing Company ceased to exist as a separate entity after 31 March 2021 and all governance and internal control issues will in future form part of the Council's and be assessed within that assurance framework.
- 24 To ensure governance arrangements continued to be effective and fit for purpose during the COVID-19 emergency the following key actions were taken:
- Cabinet delegation of Executive decision making by way of Cabinet report presented on 24 March 2020 for a temporary additional delegation be granted to the Chief Executive, all Strategic Directors, and in their absence the relevant Service Director, to deal with executive decisions that would normally be considered by the Cabinet, to minimise the business to be transacted at meetings associated with the Corona virus pandemic. All key decisions taken under these powers were recorded. This arrangement was used until Mid May 2020 and then was superseded once Cabinet meetings were able to be held remotely.
 - Community Shielding Hubs continued to coordinate identification of demand and delivery of support.
 - Business Impact Assessments were reviewed at two key points in the year, and Business Continuity Plans developed for all critical activities to minimise the risk of interruptions in the delivery of those activities.
 - Key decision making meetings with Councillors conducted remotely using virtual conferencing technology.
 - COVID-19 Response Team established to coordinate delivery and resourcing of Council COVID related activities including Enforcement, Business Contact, Resident Contact, Contact Tracing, Health Data, Testing and Vaccinations, Procurement, Finance, Governance and Information Routes, Comms, LRF, Excess Deaths, Local Traffic & Pedestrian Management, Events, Free School Meal Provision in Holidays, along with resilience arrangements to mitigate threats to business continuity.

Review of Effectiveness

- 25 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and the CIPFA/SOLACE Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework have established requirements that all local authorities must adhere to in relation to governance arrangements. The Council must ensure that it has a sound system of internal control which:
- Facilitates the effective exercise of its functions and the achievement of its aims and objectives;
 - Ensures that the financial and operational management of the Council is effective; and
 - Includes effective arrangements for the management of risk.
- 26 The Council must, each financial year, conduct a review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control and to include the results in an Annual Governance Statement which accompanies the Statement of Accounts.

- 27 The review of the effectiveness of governance arrangements is informed by:
- The opinion of the Members of the Cabinet;
 - The work of senior managers within the Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment;
 - An assessment of the Systems of Internal Audit, incorporating a review of the Internal Audit Service and the Audit and Standards Committee, and the Chief Internal Auditor's annual report;
 - Corporate Risk Management arrangements;
 - The robustness of Performance Management and Data Quality information;
 - Views of the external auditor and other external inspectorates;
 - Assurance from the Strategic Director, Corporate Services and Governance on the operation of Council's Legal and Regulatory Framework;
 - Assurance from the Strategic Director, Resources and Digital on the operation of the Council's financial controls;
 - Partnership governance arrangements; and
 - Counter fraud and corruption arrangements.
- 28 The Council's Constitution sets out the role of the Leader and Cabinet as follows:
- To lead change and make recommendations for change to the Council, in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders;
 - To ensure that the Council's priorities within the policy framework and budget are implemented, making decisions within that framework where appropriate;
 - To monitor the implementation of the budget and policy framework through taking a lead role on Best Value and through co-ordination with the Overview and Scrutiny role; and
 - To provide a public face on specific issues.
- 29 The Council's Local Code of Governance is reviewed regularly and was last approved by the Audit and Standards Committee on 25 January 2021. Assurance was sought from Councillors who served on the Cabinet during 2020/21, in the form of a self-assessment statement, on the effectiveness of the Council's corporate governance arrangements. A report was presented to the Audit and Standards Committee on 21 June 2021 in which all Members of the Cabinet considered that governance arrangements are effective.
- 30 Service Directors have carried out self-assessments of the processes, controls and governance arrangements they have in place to allow them to achieve their service objectives including consideration of relevant assessments to ensure that no aspects of governance were adversely affected by the impact of COVID-19 and where necessary arrangements were put in place to ensure the Council's activities continued to be conducted appropriately, . These included considerations of the effectiveness of internal controls. A report was presented to the Audit and Standards Committee on 21 June 2021 which concluded that, based on the self- assessments, Service Directors agree that effective controls were in place.
- 31 The Chief Internal Auditor reports to the Council's Strategic Director, Resources and Digital, but to ensure independence has direct and unfettered access to the Chief

Executive, the Strategic Director, Corporate Services and Governance (Monitoring Officer), and the Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee. A review of the effectiveness of Internal Audit, incorporating the Internal Audit Service and the Audit and Standards Committee, has been undertaken and was reported to the Audit and Standards Committee on 21 June 2021. This included an assessment of compliance with the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit (2019) and compliance with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. This review concluded that the Council's system of internal audit is considered to be effective, which in turn allows the opinion of the Chief Internal Auditor to be relied upon.

- 32 The Chief Internal Auditor provides an independent opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the system of internal control, risk management and governance arrangements which was incorporated in the Annual Internal Audit Report to the Audit and Standards Committee on 21 June 2021. This opinion is based on 50 audit reviews undertaken during the year which found all systems reviewed to be operating well or satisfactorily, except in eight cases where significant weaknesses were identified. These weaknesses were in specific areas and as such there are no areas for improvement disclosed in this statement for 2020/21 as a result of the work of the Internal Audit Service.
- 33 The Council's Chief Internal Auditor is also the Chief Internal Auditor for the Gateshead Housing Company, and on this basis provides an independent opinion on the adequacy of the Company's internal control systems based on the Internal Audit reviews carried out during the year. Based on evidence arising from Internal Audit activity during 2020/21, the opinion of the Chief Internal Auditor reported to the Housing Company's Board meeting on 22 June 2021 is that the Company's internal control systems are considered to be effective. This opinion forms part of the Company's report on the Statement of Internal Control to the Board meeting on 22 June 2021.
- 34 The Annual Risk Management Report was presented to the Audit and Standards Committee on 21 June 2021 which concluded that risk management arrangements are effective.
- 35 The Annual Report on Counter Fraud Arrangements was presented to the Audit and Standards Committee on 21 June 2021 which concluded that counter fraud arrangements are effective.
- 36 Regular reports on performance management information and data quality have been considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet over the course of the year in accordance with the Council's performance management framework. Based on the information provided during the year and internal reviews of data quality, effective controls are in place. In addition, during the year the Council has developed a new Performance Management and Improvement Framework which will be used from 2021/22. This identifies the interventions and strategic and operational measures that will track progress towards achieving the Council's corporate priorities for Thrive and delivery through the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- 37 No work undertaken by external bodies or inspectorates during the year identified weaknesses in internal controls or governance arrangements.

- 38 Assurance on the effectiveness of the Council’s legal and regulatory framework has been provided by the Strategic Director, Corporate Services and Governance, who as Monitoring Officer has a legal duty to ensure the lawfulness and fairness of decision-making within the Council. Compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations is ensured by the requirement in the Constitution to give the Chief Executive, the Monitoring Officer and the Chief Finance Officer the opportunity to comment on every committee report submitted to a decision-making body. No areas of significant non-compliance have occurred during 2020/21.
- 39 Assurance on the effectiveness of the Council’s financial controls has been provided by the Strategic Director, Resources and Digital (Chief Financial Officer) who is designated as the responsible officer for the administration of the Council’s financial affairs under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972. Effective systems are in place to ensure the lawfulness and financial prudence of decision-making and to fully discharge the responsibilities of the role. The financial arrangements in place conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government.
- 40 Service Directors review partnerships within their Service areas on an annual basis. As partners are key to the delivery of the Council’s objectives, assurance of their control and governance systems is required. The corporate guidance on managing partnerships effectively was updated in 2014 and is reviewed on an annual basis. The consensus amongst Service Directors was that all Partnership Arrangements have been established in compliance with the Council’s Guide to Partnership Working. In addition, the most recent review of this area by the Internal Audit Service found it to be operating satisfactorily.
- 41 A report to Cabinet 24 March 2020 informed on the outcome of the comprehensive review of the delivery model for the Council’s housing stock and sought approval to develop a detailed business plan to implement the preferred option – the management and maintenance of the Council’s housing stock is re-integrated within the Council. This was to include a review of all services currently provided by TGHC and include relevant Council services to ensure the most efficient and effective delivery model. Following a review during 2020/21 of the most efficient and effective delivery model for managing the Council’s housing stock the decision was taken to co-locate the process and the Housing Company was wound up with effect 31 March 2021.

Actions Taken to Improve Governance Following Previous Annual Governance Statement

Governance Issue	Planned Action	Action Taken	Outstanding Matters
Strengthen Council arrangements for oversight and performance monitoring of management of	Continue to work with the Regulator to give assurance that all areas of non-compliance are progressing in line with the detailed action plan.	In order to facilitate the Council’s exit from the Voluntary Undertaking, an independent compliance audit commenced 16 th April 2021 as part of the process to provide assurance to the Regulator of Social Housing that Gateshead is sufficiently progressed with a	None

<p>housing stock and housing services to realise Council policies and objectives in relation to the Housing Strategy.</p>	<p>Ensure that an appropriate Governance framework is in place to support both the decision on the future model of delivery and implementation of the chosen model itself.</p>	<p>resourced and deliverable action plan that has effective and robust controls in place to return to and maintain compliance. The first data sharing exercise took place on 27th April 2021 and reconciliation of that data is in progress and expected to continue into June 2021. It is anticipated, following receipt of the audit findings, that the Council will be in a position to exit in July 2021.</p> <p>The governance framework following the transfer of the housing function to the Council has been agreed by the Council for the new municipal year 2021/22. This includes monitoring performance of housing-related functions within the Council's refreshed Performance Management Framework reporting to the new Housing, Environment & Healthy Communities OSC (with a new focus on the housing function following transfer of management from TGHC).</p>	
<p>Resilience</p>	<p>A review of lessons learned from the response to COVID-19, including the Council's Constitution to be conducted.</p>	<p>Review of the Constitution commenced in March 2021.</p> <p>Operating procedures were continuously reviewed during the year to ensure they continued to make the best use of finite resources within the COVID operating restrictions. Two reviews of Business Impact Assessments and Business Continuity Plans were conducted during the year to ensure developments in working practices and the operating environment, including COVID impacts were captured and provide assurance on resilience of critical activities.</p>	<p>None</p>

Action Plan for 2021/22

Governance Issue	Planned Action	Responsible Officer
Scrutiny	Online Guide to Gateshead Council to be updated to ensure it continues to reflect the management structure of the Council and the Services provided to assist stakeholder scrutiny and to assist new ways of working.	Strategic Director, Corporate Services and Governance.
Resilience	A review of lessons learned from the response to COVID-19 to be conducted.	Corporate Management Team

Opinion on Governance Arrangements

- 42 Based on the review of the Council's governance arrangements during 2020/21, including the internal control and risk management environments, the opinion is that the Council's governance arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose.
- 43 Based on the review of the arrangements introduced to strengthen governance to support the Council's response to the COVID-19 emergency, the opinion is that the Council's governance arrangements continued to be fit for purpose during that period.

Joint Statement by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive

- 44 We have been advised on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by the Audit and Standards Committee on 21 June 2021 and that the arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.

Signed:

Signed:

Councillor Martin Gannon

Sheena Ramsey

Leader of the Council

Chief Executive

Dated:

Dated: