

Report of:	Meeting	Date	Item no.
Head of Governance	Audit Committee	16 June 2020	6

**DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2019/20**

**1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1 To approve the draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2019/20 for inclusion in the Annual Statement of Accounts following a review of the council's governance arrangements.

**2. Outcomes**

- 2.1 Evidence that the council has effective governance arrangements in place.

**3. Recommendation**

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to review and formally approve the draft AGS, which incorporates the council's Code of Corporate Governance.

**4. Background**

- 4.1 The AGS is a valuable means of communication. It enables an authority to explain to the community, service users, taxpayers and other stakeholders its governance arrangements and how the controls it has in place manage risks of failure in delivering its outcomes.
- 4.2 In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 the council is required to prepare an AGS, which is published alongside the Statement of Accounts.
- 4.3 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) have jointly issued a framework and guidance in relation to the AGS; 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government'. The guidance urges local authorities to prepare a governance statement in order to report publicly on the extent to which they comply with their own code of governance on an annual basis, including how they have monitored the effectiveness of their governance arrangements in the year, and on any planned changes in the coming period. The process of preparing the governance statement

should itself add value to the corporate governance and internal control framework of an organisation. It also recommends that when complying with the guidance, authorities should use it in a way that best reflects their structure, type, functions and size.

- 4.4** The framework recognises that effective governance is achieved through seven core principles;
- A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law;
  - B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement;
  - C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits;
  - D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes;
  - E. Developing the entity’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it;
  - F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management; and
  - G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability.

**5. Key Issues and proposals**

- 5.1** The draft AGS for 2019/2020 is attached at Appendix 1. Owing to the Covid-19 epidemic, the usual workshop of key officers was unable to take place. However ‘Microsoft Teams’ was used to ensure all key officers were given the opportunity to provide information and key evidence to support how the organisation has complied with the principles set out in paragraph 4.4 above during the year.
- 5.2** The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive will be asked to sign the statement certifying that they are aware of the governance issues within the Authority and of the measures that are needed to mitigate them.

<b>Financial and legal implications</b>	
Finance	None arising directly from the report.
Legal	Effective audit and risk management assist in good governance and the probity of council actions.

**Other risks / implications: checklist**

If there are significant implications arising from this report on any issues marked with a ✓ below, the report author will have consulted with the appropriate specialist officers on those implications and addressed them in the body of the report. There

are no significant implications arising directly from this report, for those issues marked with an x.

risks/implications	✓ / x
community safety	x
equality and diversity	x
sustainability	x
health and safety	x

risks/implications	✓ / x
asset management	x
climate change	x
ICT	x
data protection	x

### **Processing Personal Data**

In addition to considering data protection along with the other risks/ implications, the report author will need to decide if a 'privacy impact assessment (PIA)' is also required. If the decision(s) recommended in this report will result in the collection and processing of personal data for the first time (i.e. purchase of a new system, a new working arrangement with a third party) a PIA will need to have been completed and signed off by Data Protection Officer before the decision is taken in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018

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<b>List of background papers:</b>		
name of document	date	where available for inspection
None		

### **List of appendices**

Appendix 1 – Draft Annual Governance Statement 2019/20

## **DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2019/20**

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION TO CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

- 1.1 Good governance leads to good management, good performance, good stewardship of public money, good public engagement and ultimately leads to good outcomes for the residents and the service users of Wyre. Good governance also enables the council to pursue its corporate vision effectively, as well as underpinning that vision, with mechanisms for control and management of risks.

### **2.0 SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY**

- 2.1 Wyre Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and appropriate standards, that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and that funding is used economically, efficiently and effectively. Wyre 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.
- 2.2 In discharging this overall responsibility, Wyre Council is responsible for putting in place suitable arrangements for the governance of its affairs, which facilitate the effective exercise of its functions and includes arrangements for the management of risk.
- 2.3 Wyre 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.

### **3.0 THE PURPOSE OF THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK**

- 3.1 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the authority is directed and controlled, together with the activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. 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, cost-effective services.
- 3.2 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 meet the targets in our 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 Wyre Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

3.3 The governance framework has been in place at Wyre Council for the year ended 31 March 2020 and up to the date of approval of the annual statement of accounts.

#### **4.0 WYRE COUNCIL'S LOCAL CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

4.1 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) have published a framework and guidance for delivering good governance in local government. The guidance helps local authorities to interpret the overarching principles contained in the framework prior to developing and maintaining their own 'local' corporate governance arrangements. The framework recognises that effective governance is achieved through seven core principles and 21 sub-principles.

4.2 It should be noted that the CIPFA / SOLACE guidance is not prescriptive and authorities are encouraged to use it in a way that best reflects their structure, type, functions and size.

#### **5.0 HOW WE COMPLY WITH THE CIPFA/SOLACE FRAMEWORK**

5.1 Set out below is how the council has complied with the seven core principles set out in the CIPFA / SOLACE framework during 2019/20.

##### **Core Principle A - Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.**

###### Behaving with integrity

- Established codes of conduct define expected standards of personal behaviour for both staff and Members.
- The Council has a set of corporate values for its staff reflecting public expectations about the conduct and behaviour of individuals and these are reflected in the recruitment and selection and performance appraisal processes.
- The Council has a Member Code of Conduct in place that helps to achieve high standards of conduct for elected Members.
- Induction training is in place for both staff and newly elected Members.
- Arrangements are in place to ensure that Members and employees of the council are not influenced by prejudice, bias or conflicts of interest in dealing with different stakeholders.
- A register of interests is maintained for Members and officers.
- An up-to-date register of gifts and hospitality is maintained and is reviewed annually by the Monitoring Officer and the Audit Committee.
- There is an efficient Standards Committee.
- Arrangements are in place for whistleblowing, to which all officers, Members and all those contracting with the council have access. The policy is reviewed annually by the Audit Committee.
- Arrangements are in place so that conflicts of interest on behalf of Members and

officers are avoided.

- Effective, transparent and accessible arrangements are in place for dealing with complaints.

#### Demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values

- The Head of Governance (Chief Internal Auditor) champions ethical compliance for both officers and Members.
- An Ethical Governance Survey for staff was carried out in November 2018. This will be rolled out to Elected Members in 2020.
- Protocols are in place for partnership working. These are documented in the council's Financial Regulations and Financial Procedure Rules.
- A competency framework, listing required behaviours and values, is currently used to drive recruitment and regular performance reviews are undertaken as part of the performance appraisal system.
- Policies and procedures are in place and are regularly reviewed for dealing with unacceptable behaviours.

#### Respecting the rule of law

- The authority has complied with both the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer and the Head of Internal Audit in Local Government.
- The Constitution sets out the responsibilities of elected Members by defining the decision-making powers of the Council, Executive, Overview and Scrutiny and regulatory and other committees, providing clear terms of reference, and describing roles and functions.
- The Head of Governance (Chief Internal Auditor) has extensive internal audit experience and is professionally qualified. She is a certified and chartered auditor (CIA, CMIIA) and also holds a Qualification in Internal Audit Leadership (QIAL).
- Anti-fraud and anti-corruption policies are in place and reviewed annually by Audit Committee.
- The Monitoring Officer is responsible to the council for ensuring that agreed procedures are followed and that all applicable statutes and regulations are complied with.
- Up to date job descriptions and person specifications are maintained for the Chief Executive, Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer.
- All staff completed training in respect of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the incorporated General Data Protection Regulations in 2018.
- Regular training is provided to elected Members who sit on regulatory committees such as Planning, Licensing and the Audit Committee.
- Specific legislative requirements are observed, as well as the requirements of general law, and in particular the key principle of good administrative law, rationality, legality and natural justice form part of procedures and decision-making.
- Proper professional advice on matters that have legal or financial implications is available and when sought, recorded in advance of decision-making.
- Limits of lawful activity are recognised by the ultra vires doctrine and managers strive to utilise their powers to the full benefit of the community.
- All allegations concerning breaches of the code by elected Members are

thoroughly investigated.

## **Core Principle B – Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.**

### Openness

- A business plan is published annually giving information on the council's strategic narrative, priorities and performance measures which is shared with all officers, Members, partners and the community.
- An annual statement of accounts is produced with an easy to read narrative report.
- The annual efficiency statement is published with the revenue estimates.
- The Corporate Director Resources (Section 151 Officer) is responsible for publishing annual accounts, in a timely manner and within statutory deadlines, to communicate the council's activities and achievements, its financial position and performance.
- The council as a whole is open and accessible to the community, service users and its officers and 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.
- The council complies with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015.
- Wyre Voice, an information leaflet produced by the council, is delivered to every household annually with a monthly E-newsletter being sent to those who have subscribed.
- A monthly newsletter 'core brief' is produced and cascaded to all staff.
- Periodic reports are produced on Overview and Scrutiny function activity.
- Key decisions are published in the Schedule of Executive Decisions.
- All report authors have been offered training on report writing.
- Audio recordings of Council meetings are available on the council's website.
- A property investment panel has been established which will consider proposals for investment opportunities.

### Engaging comprehensively with institutional stakeholders

- The leisure management partnership board meets regularly to oversee the operation of the council's leisure centres and pools.
- Key partnerships are periodically reviewed through the internal audit plan and the Financial Regulations and Financial Procedure Rules include advice and guidance which can assist officers in managing the key risks of partnership arrangements.
- Corporate guidance has been issued on consultation and public involvement mechanisms offering practical steps and advice.
- The council maintains links with the parish and town councils by regular attendance at the Lancashire Association of Local Councils (LALC) meetings.
- Clear channels of communication are in place with all sections of the community and other stakeholders including monitoring arrangements to ensure that they operate effectively, e.g. flood forums, the Fylde and Wyre Health and Wellbeing Partnership Board, the Waste Management Partnership Board and the Leisure Management Partnership Board.

### Engaging with individual citizens and service users effectively

- The council's vision, strategic plans, priorities and targets are developed through robust mechanisms, and in consultation with the local community and other key stakeholders, and are clearly articulated and disseminated.
- Arrangements are in place to enable the council to engage with all sections of the community effectively. These arrangements recognise that different sections of the community have different priorities and there are explicit processes for dealing with these competing demands.
- The Council runs a Digital Hub located at the Fleetwood Market in partnership with Citizens Advice to provide additional support to residents to help them develop their digital skills.
- Every year, a State of Wyre update is produced providing local data and intelligence linked to our business plan priorities.
- A 'together we make a difference network' is in place. This informal membership network led by the council is made up of council officers, elected Members and partners from all sectors with the aim to enable local people to make a difference in their local communities.
- The Council undertakes regular consultation and all are available through the online consultation portal.

### **Core Principle C – Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.**

#### Defining outcomes

- The Council has made a clear statement of its vision, ambitions, key programmes and projects in its business plan (2019 – 2023) which is used for service and corporate planning.
- The business plan includes a set of measures defining outcomes which are reported quarterly to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- There are effective arrangements to deal with failure in service delivery.
- There is a corporate complaints procedure with annual reports from the Local Government Ombudsman being available on the website.
- The medium term financial plan (MTFP) / revenue estimates and capital programme are soundly based and are designed to deliver the council's strategic priorities.
- The value for money indicators are reviewed annually with the results being reported to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- The council's approach to value for money is reflected in the annual efficiency statement reported to Cabinet with targets and achievements monitored throughout the year.
- Strategic and operational risk registers are maintained and workshops are held throughout the year to review current risks and identify new risks. The risk registers are reviewed quarterly, in line with the business plan and the efficiency programme. It should be noted that owing to Covid-19, operational risk workshops did not physically take place in Feb 2020. However Heads of Service were still



asked to carry out the review and identification of new risks remotely.

### Sustainable economic, social and environmental benefit

- The council embraces community engagement and involvement and encourages neighbourhood engagement and works collectively with ward councillors, parish and town councillors, community groups and other partner organisations to identify local issues and priorities.
- Our business plan states a number of ambitions which will improve the health and wellbeing of our communities.
- Relationships have been established with clinical leads from the Blackpool, Preston, Morecambe Bay and Fylde coast clinical commissioning groups with a view to influencing service provision.
- The business plan is subject to an equality impact assessment on an annual basis.
- The development and delivery of the local plan has been subject to extensive consultation.
- Individual projects are equality impact assessed promoting access to services.
- Our 'together we make a difference network' works with the community to identify priority projects, makes links with partners, develops relationships with key stakeholders and helps facilitate the delivery of community priorities.
- The Council has been awarded a number of both green and blue flag awards for our clean beaches and parks and open spaces.
- The Council's Constitution has been amended to ensure 'Social Value' is considered when procuring goods and services.
- A masterplan is being developed for Fleetwood and a bid has been submitted for Future High Street Fund to kick start the economic regeneration of Fleetwood Town Centre. Funding has already been secured through CCF5 and Heritage Action Zone to start redevelopment projects at Fleetwood Market and for shop front improvements in the heritage quarter.
- In March 2020 the Council launched a new weekly online community lottery to provide good causes and community groups with a simple way to raise funds.

### **Core Principle D – Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.**

#### Determining interventions

- There are mechanisms in place for documenting evidence for decisions and recording the criteria, rationale and considerations on which decisions are based.
- Those making decisions are provided with information that is fit for purpose and relevant.
- Limits of lawful activity are recognised by the ultra vires doctrine and managers strive to utilise their powers to the full benefit of the community.
- Proper, professional advice on matters that have legal or financial implications is available and when sought, recorded in advance of decision making.
- The Section 151 Officer sits on the Digital Transformation Board.

### Planning interventions

- The Council's business plan is refreshed annually and is subject to review by Overview and Scrutiny prior to approval by Full Council.
- Business plan actions are managed by officers and monitored by Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- The business plan is developed taking into account the Life in Wyre survey and other demographic information, including locality plans, neighbourhood profiles, State of Wyre updates and public health reports.
- Service quality is regularly reviewed via the council's formal complaints system, the Waste Management Partnership Board and the Leisure Management Partnership Board.
- The business plan includes a set of measures which are reported quarterly to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- The MTFP, revenue estimates and capital programme are published annually and are key documents for forecasting our budget requirements and planning ahead.
- An efficiency programme compliments the MTFP ensuring sustainability going forward.
- We explore opportunities to work with our partners and collaborate on funding applications.

### Optimising achievement of intended outcomes

- The MTFP is agreed annually in October and updated regularly with a revised projection being presented to Management Board and published with the revenue estimates in February.
- The MTFP, revenue estimates and capital programme are soundly configured to meet the requirements of the business plan.
- The MTFP sets out the framework for corporately managing the council's resources in the years ahead.

## **Core Principle E – Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.**

### Developing the Entity's capacity

- There is an agreement between the council and the YMCA identifying arrangements for the management of the council's health and fitness centres. Regular meetings are held covering operational and financial matters. In 2019/20 the YMCA reported that they would not meet the subsidy target and a contract variation was agreed. The position will continue to be monitored in 2020/21 in light of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Effective mechanisms exist to monitor service delivery through the Overview and Scrutiny arrangements and quarterly performance reports highlight where corrective action is necessary.
- A key activity in the council's business plan is to continue the programme of works to maximise the use of our assets.
- The council subscribes to the APSE advisory service, with a view to benchmarking

its front line services.

- Benchmarking is undertaken via relevant Lancashire professional groups e.g. revenues, audit, finance etc.
- The council plays an active role in the Fylde and Wyre health and wellbeing partnership.
- The council's performance appraisal system allows for documentation of the development of the individual through their personal development plan.
- Commercial awareness training was provided for all staff in 2017.
- The council's Chief Internal Auditor is currently undertaking a similar role for Lancaster City Council on a contractual basis.
- In 2018, the Internal Audit Service received a 'full compliance' overall opinion when assessed against the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS).
- The council regularly benchmarks Member's allowances as part of the review undertaken by the Independent Remuneration Panel.
- The Council attends the Lancashire Waste Partnership and is current evaluating options following the release of the DEFRA Resources and Waste Strategy 2018 with advisory groups such as the Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee (LARAC) and the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE).

#### Developing the capacity of the entity's leadership and other individuals

- The Chief Executive is responsible and accountable to the council for all aspects of operational management and is required to attend regular performance appraisal meetings with the Leader of the Council.
- The Corporate Director Resources (Section 151 officer) is responsible to the council for ensuring that appropriate advice is given on all financial matters, for keeping proper financial records and accounts, and for maintaining an effective system of internal financial control.
- There is an established pay and grading structure for employees referred to as the job evaluation system and a process for appeals.
- There is a clearly defined management structure and a scheme of delegation to officers, which is underpinned by the Members' Code of Conduct and a protocol for officer / Member relations.
- There are published job descriptions and established protocols, which ensure that the Leader and Chief Executive establish their respective roles early in the relationship and that a shared understanding of roles and objectives is maintained.
- Financial Regulations and Financial Procedure Rules are reviewed annually by the Audit Committee.
- Career structures are in place for Members and officers to facilitate succession planning.
- The Council is currently supporting three individuals through an apprenticeship in Leadership and Management which ends in October 2020.
- Effective management arrangements are in place both at the top of and throughout the organisation to support the health and wellbeing of officers.
- The council assesses the skills required by elected Members and officers and makes a commitment to develop these to enable roles to be carried out effectively.
- The council ensures that the statutory officers have the skills, resources and support necessary to perform effectively in their roles and that these roles are properly understood throughout the council.
- Training programmes are tailored to meet individual needs and there are

opportunities for elected Members and officers to update their knowledge on a regular basis.

- Skills are developed on a continuing basis to improve performance, including the ability to scrutinise and challenge and to recognise when outside expert advice is needed.
- Arrangements are in place via the volunteering initiative to encourage individuals from all sections of the community to engage with, contribute to and participate in the work of the Authority.
- A competency framework exists to ensure that all staff have appropriate skills enabling them to deliver high quality services.
- A Corporate Management Team restructure took place in late 2019 and from 1 December 2019 a smaller Corporate Management Team was in place. The team reduced from three Service Directors and the Head of Finance (s.151 Officer) to three Corporate Directors (including the s.151 Officer).

## **Core Principle F – Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.**

### Managing risk

- Risk management is embedded into the culture of the council, with Members and managers at all levels recognising that risk management is part of their job.
- The risk management policy is refreshed annually and approved by the Audit Committee.
- The Council has individual BREXIT and ICT risk registers which are reviewed on a regular basis.
- Strategic and operational risk registers are maintained and workshops are held regularly to review current risks and identify any new risks. It should be noted that owing to Covid-19, operational risk workshops did not physically take place in February 2020. However Heads of Service were still asked to carry out the review and identification of new risks remotely.
- Information asset registers are in place and are reviewed by Internal Audit as part of each audit review ensuring compliance with legislation and demonstrating best practice in information governance.

### Managing performance

- Performance is regularly reported to Corporate Management Team and Cabinet.
- The council has an Overview and Scrutiny Committee which allows for constructive challenge and enhances the council's performance overall.
- There are effective mechanisms for documenting evidence for decisions and recording the criteria, rationale and considerations on which decisions are based.
- There is a calendar of dates for submitting, publishing and distributing timely reports to the council's committees.
- Quarterly performance reports are submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

### Robust internal control

- An effective internal audit function is adequately resourced and maintained.
- Internal audit reviews are conducted under the Auditing Practices Board guidelines and in line with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS).
- In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, an annual assessment of the council's systems of internal audit is carried out using the PSIAS and the checklist provided in the Local Government Application Note published by CIPFA. The standards also require an external assessment be carried out every five years. In April 2018 the Internal Audit Services received a 'full compliance' overall opinion following an external assessment carried out by Allerdale Borough Council and Preston City Council. The next review is scheduled for February 2023.
- The Head of Governance (Chief Internal Auditor) has developed a quality assurance improvement programme to ensure the continual improvement of the internal audit service.
- An effective Audit Committee is in place, which is independent of the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny function.
- The Audit Committee undertakes an annual review of its own effectiveness against the checklist in the CIPFA guidance 'effective audit committees' and is satisfied that it meets the required standard.
- Both the Head of Governance (Chief Internal Auditor) and Senior Auditor have extensive experience and are both professionally qualified. The Chief Internal Auditor is a Chartered Auditor and also holds a Qualification in Internal Audit Leadership. The Senior Auditor is a Certified Auditor.
- The implementation of internal audit reports recommendations is monitored by the Internal Audit Team and the Audit Committee.
- Counter-fraud policies are in place and reviewed annually. The effectiveness of these policies is reviewed on a regular basis.
- Robust whistleblowing arrangements are in place with the ethical governance survey results showing that a high percentage of staff had a good understanding of the policy and knew how to raise concerns.

### Managing data

- In 2018, staff received training on the new Data Protection Act 2018 and the incorporated General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) using an e-learning package.
- The council has appointed a Data Protection Officer who is responsible for ensuring the council's compliance with the Date Protection Act 2018 and the incorporated GDPR.
- In November 2019, the Audit Committee were given delegated responsibility for ensuring the council is compliant to the Data Protection Act and the GDPR and receives six monthly updates from the Head of Governance (Chief Internal Auditor).
- Information Asset Registers are in place to demonstrate the council knows what data it processes, where it is stored and how it is shared internally and externally.
- Information is stored securely and confidential waste disposal arrangements are in place.
- Key performance data is regularly reviewed for accuracy by internal audit.

### Strong public financial management

- Those making decisions are provided with information that is fit for purpose, relevant, timely and gives clear explanations of technical and financial issues and their implications.
- An up to date register of gifts and hospitality is held and is annually inspected by the council's Audit Committee and the Monitoring Officer.
- There is an established pay and grading structure in place for employees.
- Financial Regulations and Financial Procedures Rules are reviewed annually and any changes are presented to the Audit Committee for approval.
- Registers of interests are maintained for both officers and elected Members.
- The External Auditors issued an unqualified value for money conclusion for the 2018/19 financial year.

### **Core Principle G – Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability.**

#### Implementing good practice in transparency

- The council complies with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015.
- Wyre Voice, an information leaflet produced by the council is delivered to every house in the Borough.
- An easy to read 'narrative report' accompanies the Statement of Accounts.
- The Local Government Ombudsman annual report is published on the council's website.

#### Implementing good practices in reporting

- Annual presentations are delivered for elected Members concerning the council's finances as part of the production of the revenue estimates, the capital programme and the update of the MTFP.
- A set of questions and answers supports the financial position at the year-end illustrating key issues for members of the Audit Committee and the relevant stakeholders.
- The annual efficiency statement is published alongside the revenue estimates as part of the report to Cabinet in February.
- The Annual Governance Statement is regularly reviewed by the Section 151 Officer and the Head of Governance (Chief Internal Auditor). The action plan is monitored by the Corporate Management Team and reported to Audit Committee.
- The value for money indicators are reviewed annually with the results being reported to Cabinet.
- Project management information is available for elected Members via spreadsheets.
- Executive update reports are prepared and delivered by portfolio holders to Full Council.

## Assurance and effective accountability

- An effective internal audit function is resourced and maintained enabling them to deliver an annual internal audit opinion.
- The Head of Governance (Chief Internal Auditor) has reported in her Annual Audit Report that 'adequate' assurance can be given that the council has satisfactory controls in place in the areas audited to be able to maintain an adequate and effective internal control environment. However it should be noted that owing to the Covid-19 pandemic and limited resources which led to the delay in work completed at the start of the year, there has been limited coverage over the audit universe and a number of audit pieces of work have not been completed.
- In accordance with the Audit and Account Regulations 2015, an annual assessment of the effectiveness of the internal audit function is completed.
- The Audit Committee work programme provides the opportunity for the Head of Governance (Chief Internal Auditor) to have a private and confidential discussion with the Audit Committee members.
- The council participates in RIPA inspections as and when required.
- Key partnerships are periodically reviewed through the internal audit plan with delivery via third parties being included in the assurance reviews undertaken annually.
- The Financial Regulations and Financial Procedure Rules include partnership guidance which can assist officers in managing the key risks of any partnership arrangements.
- Clear terms of reference exist for the key partnerships, clarifying arrangements for accountability, for example the Waste Management Partnership, the Leisure Management Partnership, Fylde and Wyre Health and Wellbeing Board and the Community Safety Partnership.

## **6.0 RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 6.1 The council has adopted a corporate risk management policy and operates a fully integrated risk management system across the organisation. Relevant officers have received training in risk management enabling the production of operational risk registers with associated risk action plans, which are reviewed on a regular basis.
- 6.2 Each year the council's Corporate Management Team (CMT) holds a strategic risk workshop, to identify and prioritise strategic risks and to produce an action plan. Significant business risks that may impact upon the council's priorities have been identified and assessed, and appropriate control measures are in place. The report and associated action plan is presented to Management Board and Audit Committee and progress is monitored on a quarterly basis through the CMT.
- 6.3 The Council has an ICT risk register which is reviewed quarterly with ICT by Internal Audit and the Service Director for Performance and Innovation.

6.4 In preparedness for the UK leaving the European Union in January 2020, the council populated a BREXIT risks register which is reviewed on a regular basis following updates from Central Government, CMT and Head of Services.

## **7.0 REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS**

7.1 In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the council must ensure that it has a sound system of internal control which:

- a) facilitates the effective exercise of its functions and the achievement of its aims and objectives,
- b) ensures that the financial and operational management of the council is effective; and
- c) includes effective arrangements for the management of risk.

7.2 The council is also responsible for conducting a review each financial year of the effectiveness of the system of internal control.

7.3 The Corporate Director Resources (Section 151 Officer) is responsible for the proper administration of the council's financial affairs. This includes responsibility for maintaining and reviewing Financial Regulations and Financial Procedure Rules, to ensure they remain fit for purpose, submitting any additions or changes necessary to the Audit Committee for approval and reporting, where appropriate, breaches of the Regulations to the Cabinet and/or the Council.

7.4 The Corporate Director Resources (Section 151 Officer) also has responsibility for:

- overseeing the implementation and monitoring the operation of the Code of Corporate Governance;
- maintaining and updating the Code in the light of latest guidance on best practice; and
- reporting annually to the Corporate Management Team and to Members on compliance with the Code and any changes that may be necessary to maintain it and ensure effectiveness in practice.

7.5 Wyre Council's internal audit service, via a specific responsibility assigned to the Head of Governance (Chief Internal Auditor) is required to provide an independent and objective opinion to the council on its risk management, governance and internal control environment. The Chief Internal Auditor's Annual report for 2019/20 concluded that 'adequate' assurance can be given that the council has satisfactory controls in place in the areas audited to be able to maintain an adequate and effective internal control environment.

7.6 It was also reported that there has been limited audit coverage across the organisation because a number of pieces of work have not been completed owing to the Covid-19 pandemic and limited resources at the start of the year.



7.7 Owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, the workshop normally carried out at the end of the year with key officers did not take place. However 'Microsoft Teams' was used to ensure all key officers were given the opportunity to provide information and key evidence to support how the organisation had complied with the principles set out in the Delivering Good Governance in Local Government guidance. Compliance to the governance framework and the core principles has also been reviewed by the Corporate Director Resources (Section 151 Officer), the Head of Governance (Chief Internal Auditor) and the Audit Committee.

## **8.0 VALUE FOR MONEY CONCLUSION**

8.1 The External Auditors issued an unqualified value for money conclusion in their most recent review for 2018/19. This means that they are satisfied that the Authority had appropriate arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of its resources. They raised no high priority recommendations as a result of their work.

## **9.0 SIGNIFICANT GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

9.1 No significant governance issues have been raised that require documenting separately in the Annual Governance Statement.

9.2 When reviewing compliance to the guidance, a number of minor issues have been identified which have been documented in an action plan that will be monitored by Corporate Management Team and reported to the Audit Committee in November each year.

## **10.0 REVIEWING AND REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS**

10.1 The CIPFA/SOLACE guidance recommends that authorities should undertake annual reviews of their governance arrangements to ensure continuing compliance with best practice as set out in the framework.

10.2 Each year, normally in April / May, a governance workshop is held with key officers of the council who have the most appropriate knowledge, expertise and levels of seniority to consider the extent to which the organisation complies with the principles set out in the good governance framework. The principles are discussed in length and evidence is put forward to demonstrate how the council is meeting each of the principles. It is also an opportunity to identify any issues or gaps that could lead to a weaker governance structure. Following this meeting, the AGS and an action plan of minor issues is submitted for consideration by the Leader and Chief Executive who then sign to certify they are aware of the governance issues within the Authority and of the measures that are required to improve the

controls around the council's governance framework. As detailed above, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic this workshop did not take place. However alternative arrangements were made to ensure that compliance could still be neared and documented.

## **11.0 CERTIFICATION**

***As the Leader of the Council, I am aware of the governance issues within this Authority and of the measures that are needed to improve the control environment. Overall, my assessment of the control environment as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 is satisfactory.***

***COUNCILLOR D HENDERSON  
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL***

***As the Chief Executive, I am aware of the governance issues within this Authority and of the measures that are needed to improve the control environment. Overall, my assessment of the control environment as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 is satisfactory.***

***G PAYNE  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE***

