

Division(s): N/A

## **AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 3 MARCH 2021**

### **Update on actions - Annual Governance Statement**

**Report by Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to consider and note the outcomes on the governance actions agreed in last year's Annual Governance Statement.**

#### **Introduction**

2. Each year the Council must approve an Annual Governance Statement. This Committee is instrumental in this and will be invited to approve a new Statement in May 2021. The Statement provides a description of the effectiveness of the Council's governance framework and an Opinion as to its sufficiency. It also normally includes a set of governance actions that will form a priority for the year ahead.
3. In last year's Annual Governance Statement (AGS), several governance actions were listed as priorities for 2020/21. As such, this report includes a brief update on those actions. The final position will, in any case, be summarised in the new Annual Governance Statement in May, in the section reviewing the past year.

#### **The actions for 2020/21**

4. An Annual Governance Statement 'looks two ways': an update is given on the actions for the previous year and a fresh set of actions is identified for the year ahead. The Actions in the AGS for the year 2020/21 were:
  - i) Developing a security strategy to reflect a more corporate approach
  - ii) Align Annual Governance Statement preparation between this Council and Cherwell District Council
  - iii) Review the Council's post-COVID governance arrangements, including lessons learned

#### **The update**

##### **Corporate Security Strategy**

5. A review of the OCC wide security arrangements has been undertaken as part of a programme of work to consolidate all delivery for this service from within the property team. In addition to that and as part of a transformation programme

to combine the County Council's property team with Cherwell District Council's property team, we are now starting to explore all the security requirements within CDC too following the same principles. This transformation work will see a new operating model being developed, under a single management structure, to support joint working between the two teams. We have started some of the scoping work for the specification for a new security service and once the new structure has been implemented a full scoping and procurement exercise will be undertaken to provide security arrangements across the both Councils estates.

### **Alignment of Annual Governance Statement preparation**

6. The partnership between this Council and Cherwell District Council afforded the opportunity to achieve a much more aligned approach to developing each authority's Annual Governance Statement.
7. As such, last year's Statements shared a common structure. This year, however, the actual preparation for the Statements has been much more integrated. The achievement of a joint senior management team for both authorities has enabled a refreshment of the Corporate Governance Assurance Group of key officer governance leads. This Group, chaired by the Monitoring Officer, consists of the governance leads across audit, corporate governance and finance.
8. Under this Group, Glenn Watson and Sarah Smith from the Council's governance team have worked closely with the service leads in both authorities to develop a common approach to the twin aspects of the Annual Governance Statement. Namely, looking at the effectiveness of current arrangements and the identifying of areas which could be further improved. This has helped as the leads have joint management responsibilities across both authorities, reducing duplication of effort and providing a consistent level of focus.
9. The forthcoming Annual Governance Statement will reflect further on this progress. Further work is needed on refreshing the *Local Codes of Corporate Governance*. While not statutory (unlike the Annual Governance Statement), the Local Codes can provide an illustration as to how an authority's policies, actions and approaches meet, on a day to day basis, the principles of good governance.

### **Review of post-COVID governance arrangements**

10. The Annual Governance Statement this year will necessarily, and rightly, focus on a review of the effectiveness of the Council's governance during the past year of COVID restrictions and demands.
11. The action last year envisaged the Council learning from this experience as, it was hoped, the COVID pandemic lessened. In practice of course, this has not happened, and the Council has necessarily continued to deliver services within the context of COVID. As such, the action still has currency, particularly in light of the national roadmap towards emergence from the pandemic. The Corporate

Governance Assurance Group, and this Committee, are well placed to keep an ongoing review on the Council's governance, including its internal controls, policies, and transparency.

12. The Annual Governance Statement this year will provide the Council and the community with view on the effectiveness of the Council's governance during the pandemic. As in previous years, as part of the Statement's preparation, the Audit Working Group review a draft of the Statement on behalf of this Committee.

### **Legal and Financial Implications**

13. There are no legal and financial implications directly arising from the recommendations in this report.

### **Equality Implications**

14. There are no equality implications raised directly by the recommendations in this report. However, it is recognised that an Annual Governance Statement, with its focus on the effectiveness of a Council's governance arrangements, is an integral part of the Council's assurance that governance is working to fairly, transparently and accountably for all.

### **ANITA BRADLEY**

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Background papers: Nil

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