



## Annual Governance Statement 2022/2023

### INTRODUCTION

1. Oxfordshire County Council is obliged to ensure 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 authority is effective; and includes effective arrangements for the management of risk.
2. In accordance with the Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, we have conducted a review of the effectiveness of our system of internal control in accordance with proper practice as set out in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice: Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (2016).
3. Whilst supporting the Council's arrangements for risk management, the governance framework cannot eliminate all risk to the achievement of policies, aims and objectives and this review can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.
4. Similarly, this review provides assurance that we have in place appropriate processes to ensure transparency and democratic oversight in decision making.
5. This statement is guided by CIPFA Advisory Note One, "Understanding the Challenge to Local Authority Governance" (March 2022) and describes our governance framework, the steps we have taken to ensure that it is effective and establishes key actions that we will put in place to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of our arrangements.
6. The review reflects enquiries made of officers with relevant knowledge, experience, and expertise. The review has been undertaken in consultation with the Council's Head of Paid Service, the Monitoring Officer, and Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer).

### OUR GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

7. The governance framework at Oxfordshire County Council comprises the systems and processes, culture, and values which the council has adopted in order to deliver on the above principles. The council has a separate code of governance, "the Oxfordshire Code of Corporate Governance" which is

consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SoLACE framework (2016). This is updated each year and evidence actively collated and assessed for compliance. Compliance with the code was reported to the Audit and Governance Committee on 15 March 2023.

8. This Statement provides:

- a. An *opinion* on the Council's governance arrangements from the Council's Strategic Leadership Team and the Leader of the Council
- b. A review of the *effectiveness* of the Council's governance arrangements during 2022/23
- c. A *conclusion* in relation to the effectiveness
- d. A review of the *action plan* completed in 2022/23
- e. An *action plan* for 2023/24
- f. An *annex* summarising our governance framework

9. As previously stated, the Annual Governance Statement is required by Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and follows the best practice guidance from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting.

## **ASSURANCE STATEMENT**

**It is our opinion that the Council's governance arrangements in 2022/23 were adequate and provide a platform for achieving the Council's priorities and challenges in 2023/24.**

## **SIGNATURES**

Signed on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council:

Martin Reeves  
Chief Executive

Councillor Liz Leffman  
Leader of the Council

# **REVIEWING OUR EFFECTIVENESS DURING 2022/23**

This review looks at:

- **Overview and review of overall effectiveness**
  - **Governance Actions – Review of 2022/23 and priorities for 2023/24**
  - **Governance Outline**
- **Decoupling from Cherwell District Council**
- **OUR AMBITIONS AND PEOPLE**
  - **Our strategic plan 2023 – 2025**
  - **Delivering the Future Together**
- **Appointment of new Chief Executive and our Statutory Governance Roles**
- **Risk Management**
- **Internal Audit 2022/23**
- **Financial Management Code**
- **Procurement**
- **Customer Feedback**
- **Service Issues**
- **Conclusion**

## Overview and review of overall effectiveness

1. The Council reviewed its overall effectiveness through a survey of all Directorates in early 2023. This required members of the Council's Extended Leadership team (consisting of mainly Directors or direct reports to Directors) to assess the level of assurance that they had in their service area regarding staff awareness and compliance in the following areas:
  - a. General corporate governance
  - b. Risk Management
  - c. Performance Management
  - d. Finance and Financial Management
  - e. Legislation
  - f. Human resources
  - g. Procurement and contract management
  - h. ICT and information governance
  - i. Health and Safety
  - j. Business Continuity
  - k. Property and security
  - l. Customer Focus
2. Any areas where issues were identified have been considered and will form part of the action plan for 2023/24.
3. Following on from the consideration at the Strategic Leadership Team of the survey responses, the Corporate Directors have each considered further the extent to which they have assurance that their Directorates adhere to the Council's corporate requirements. Again, any issues identified have been considered and will form part of the action plan for 2023/24.
4. In relation to the completion of the action plan for 2022/23, six of the eight action points were completed as outlined in Annex 1. The progress on these actions was reported to the Audit and Governance Committee throughout the year.
5. Specific action points for 2023/24 are set out in Annex 2, and this includes two actions that have been carried forward from the 2022/23 action plan, where actions remain outstanding. The Council believes these actions will help to establish some improved practices arising out of our active learning and experience in 2022/23.
6. Here are just some of ways in which the Council's governance has proved effective during 2022/23:
  - a) New scrutiny principles have been developed to build on the introduction of the new Scrutiny Committee structure.
  - b) A cross-party Member working group was established to review the Council's Constitution which made recommendations on improvements which were adopted by Council on 7 October 2022.
  - c) Electoral Review – The local government boundaries commission for England is undertaking a review of the electoral arrangements of the Council. This covers the total number of councillors to be elected to the Council, the names, number and boundaries of divisions, and the number of Councillors to be

elected from each division. A cross-party working group has undertaken detailed work on the review. The Commission supported the Council's submission for 69 single member divisions. The Working group has also developed new divisions and names, which received unanimous support of Council on 28 March 2023. The review process is likely to be completed in early 2024 in time for the County Council elections in May 2025.

- d) The Whistleblowing policy was reviewed and implemented on 23 November 2022 and is undergoing further review to reflect learning from whistleblowing reports considered in 2022/23.
- e) Following a motion to Council on 1 November 2022, the Council has established a Future Council Governance Group. The Group will report through the Audit & Governance Committee with the recommendations being submitted to Council in December 2023
- f) The Monitoring Officer provided her [annual report to the Audit and Governance Committee](#) on her view on the Council's governance arrangements. This review was formally reported to and endorsed by the Audit & Governance Committee on 21 September 2022. This report confirmed the progress in maintaining democratic accountability and transparency, with members continuing to undertake their role as community leaders

#### **Governance Actions – Review of 2022/23 and priorities for 2023/24**

7. The two annexes to this Annual Governance Statement summarise:

Annex 1: updates on the priority actions for 2022/23

Annex 2: actions for 2023/24

8. The Actions for 2022/23 in Annex 1 highlight certain aspects of emerging governance that might not otherwise be apparent from work regularly reported to the Council's Audit & Governance Committee. As such, progress reports on these actions are reported to the Committee through the year. The Actions for 2023/24 in Annex 2 will be monitored by the Corporate Governance Assurance Group (CGAG), and the Audit & Governance Committee.
9. Other governance and audit activity across the Council will continue to be reported to [Audit & Governance Committee](#) through its normal work programmes

#### **Governance in Outline**

10. Annex 3 sets out the Council's governance framework in outline. This framework was reviewed and updated in March 2023, by the Corporate Governance Assurance Group and Extended Leadership Team (ELT).

#### **Decoupling from Cherwell District Council**

11. The decision to terminate the S113 partnership agreement with Cherwell District Council was taken at the Council meeting on 8 February 2022. The Joint Officer Transition Working Group reported to the final Joint Shared Services and Personnel Committee (JSSP) on 4 July 2022. This followed the agreement to have a six-month termination period concluding on 31 August 2022. The final phase of

decoupling services was agreed, but the legal agreement is yet to be concluded and will appear in the action plan for 2023/24. The services that decoupled on 31 August 2022 were:

- Procurement and Contracts
- Customer Services
- Continuous Improvement
- Land Charges
- Property, Investment and Facilities Management
- Emergency Planning, Digital and IT services decoupled, but specific services continued to be provided by the Council to Cherwell District Council via Service Level Agreement(s) as required.

12. Subsequently, it has also been agreed that Regulatory and Community Services will be decoupled, and a six-month notice period commenced on 6 April 2023. This will also be formalised in the legal agreement as part of the action plan for 2023/24. Internal Audit and Counter Fraud services continue to be provided to both Councils.

## **OUR AMBITIONS AND PEOPLE**

### **Our strategic plan 2023 – 2025**

13. The Council's strategic plan 2023 – 2025 sets out a vision to lead positive change by working in partnership to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county.

14. The strategic plan sets out nine cross-cutting priorities and commitments to achieve the vision and the areas of focus. Our nine priorities are:

- i. Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work.
- ii. Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire.
- iii. Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents.
- iv. Support carers and the social care system.
- v. Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network.
- vi. Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces.
- vii. Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.
- viii. Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy.
- ix. Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit.

15. The plan sets out how the Council aims to achieve each priority and ways in which it will work with partners to create a more joined-up approach to delivering services.

## **Delivering the Future Together**

16. Delivering the Future Together (DTFT) is a programme of activities to help the Council to be the best it can be and become an employer of choice and ultimately a partner and place shaper of choice. DTFT underpins everything the Council does: how we work together; how we make decisions; how we engage with our people, manage change; and how we serve our residents.
17. The DTFT programme board prioritises initiatives which will deliver improvements for colleagues across the whole organisation. Listening and engaging with our employees is integral; every phase is co-designed with colleagues. Together we look to the future – its opportunities and challenges.

## **Our values and behaviours**

18. How the Council works together matters. By living our five values, we build on our strengths, reflect on lessons learnt and make continued improvements to deliver the future together – for our people and the communities we serve. The Council's five values are:
  - a. Be kind and care
  - b. Equality and Integrity in all we do
  - c. Always Learning
  - d. Taking Responsibility
  - e. Daring to do it differently

## **Our DTFT champions**

19. The Council has more than 190 colleagues from every service area who have volunteered to Champion the DTFT initiative and ensure that values and behaviours are imbedded in all aspects of the Council's work.
20. The champions' role is to facilitate regular conversations in their teams about what's working well and what could be even better. They encourage teams to think of examples where individuals and groups have lived our values and how this makes a difference. Their feedback to our extended leadership team helps us to continually improve – from identifying quick wins to prioritising future change projects.

## **DTFT achievements so far**

21. The following list sets out a number of cross-organisational achievements that have resulted from the DTFT programme. To date, the DTFT programme has:
  - a. Enabled the collaboration with colleagues to choose the Council's values and behaviours;
  - b. recruited more than 190 DTFT champions, appointed a network lead, provided ongoing training and support, and established a feedback loop;
  - c. refreshed the Council's training for managers on how to manage performance (12.3.2 framework) and invited all 900 managers to attend the workshops;
  - d. co-produced the Council's agile working framework;

- e. transformed internal communications following feedback from colleagues;
- f. procured and launched a new recognition and benefits platform (Vivup); and
- g. taken first steps to improve workspaces (refurbishing the Common Hall at County Hall, the Westgate Collaboration Space and Union Street).

## **Appointment of Chief Executive – and our statutory governance roles**

22. Stephen Chandler was appointed as Interim Chief Executive on 9 February 2022 until 28 February 2023. Martin Reeves was appointed as the permanent Chief Executive and commenced in role on 1 March 2023 following a recruitment process run by the Council's Remuneration Committee. Full Council approved the appointment on 13 December 2022.

23. The Council is required to appoint to three specific posts, each of which oversees a key aspect of the Council's governance:

- **Head of the Paid Service (HOPS)** role; responsible for how the Council's functions are delivered, and the appointment and proper management of staff. – For most of 2022/23 this was Stephen Chandler, Interim Chief Executive, who remained in post until 28 February 2023. As stated above, on 1 March 2023 Martin Reeves joined the Council as a permanent appointment to the post of Chief Executive:
- **Monitoring Officer** – and the Council's Director of Law and Governance, throughout 2022/23 has been and remains Anita Bradley.
- **'Section 151 Officer'** – the Chief Finance Officer, throughout 2022/23 has been and remains Lorna Baxter: responsible for the financial management of the authority.

24. Each of the postholders is an integral member of the Council's Strategic Leadership Team (SLT). As such, they are fully sighted on all of the Council's objectives, workstreams and emerging plans; and their perspectives and voices continue to be heard in, and to influence, this senior forum. In line with best practice, the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer report directly to the Chief Executive.

25. The Chief Finance Officer and the Monitoring Officer both have open access to the Chief Executive at all times and meet regularly as three statutory officers. They carry a statutory responsibility to report issues to Full Council, if needed. As such, the posts remain pivotal to the Council's good governance.

## **Risk Management**

26. Throughout 2022/23 the Corporate Director for Customers and Organisation Development and the Director of Finance had joint overarching responsibility for risk management. This function is led by the Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes and managed on a day-to-day basis by the Performance and Insight Team Leader.

27. The Risk and Opportunities Management Strategy is the foundation for the Council's approach to risk and opportunity management for the performance and



risk environment. This strategy is reviewed and updated where necessary on an annual basis. As well as collectively owning and supporting the Strategy ELT and SLT members work closely with the performance and Insight team to help implement the Strategy and embed risk management in OCC's everyday business delivering against the strategic priorities.

28. This strategy outlines the process of Identification, Assessment, Managing and Controlling and Review and Reporting of risks across the council. The following systems/mechanisms to ensure internal control have been in place throughout 2022/23 and are captured within the Strategy.



29. In terms of members' responsibility, Cabinet is responsible for approving the Risk and Opportunities Management Strategy. Audit and Governance Committee considered the draft Strategy and provided input and comments to Cabinet ahead of its approval. The Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes and Performance Team Leader supports the Group and directorates giving assurance around the escalation process into the Strategic risk register as necessary. The directorates are responsible for their operational risk registers.
30. Risk information above directorate level is primarily communicated through the monthly Business Management and Monitoring Reports, which include the most recent iteration of the Strategic risk register overview. Escalation of risks to the Strategic risk register is outlined on the risk management pages. Risks are discussed at SLT for consideration of including risks at strategic level or keeping at operational level with a verbal update as to progress.

### **Internal audit in 2022/23**

31. The 2019 CIPFA Statement on the "Role of the Head of Internal Audit in public service organisations" outlines the principles that define the core activities and behaviours that belong to the role of the 'Head of Internal Audit' and the governance requirements needed to support them. The Council's arrangements conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA statement with our Chief Internal Auditor carrying out the following:

- objectively assessing the adequacy and effectiveness of governance and management of risks, giving an evidence-based opinion on all aspects of governance, risk management and internal control
- championing best practice in governance and commenting on responses to emerging risks and proposed developments.
- being a senior manager with regular and open engagement across the organisation, particularly with the leadership team and with the audit committee
- leading and directing an internal audit service that is resourced appropriately, sufficiently, and effectively
- being professionally qualified and suitably experienced.

32. The Internal Audit Service operates in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). The self-assessment against the standards is completed on an annual basis. It is a requirement of the PSIAS for an external assessment of internal audit to be completed at least every five years. This took place in November 2017 and the results were reported to the Audit & Governance Committee in January 2018. This confirmed that the “service is highly regarded within the Council and provides useful assurance on its underlying systems and processes”. The next external assessment was due in 2022/23 however was delayed due to recruitment/staffing issues within the team. An assessor is currently being selected and the review will be completed by December 2023.

33. The Chief Internal Auditor prepared an Annual Report on the work of Internal Audit which concludes for the 12 months ended 31 March 2023, there is **satisfactory** assurance regarding Oxfordshire County Council's overall control environment and the arrangements for governance, risk management and control. Where issues have been identified through internal audit review, they have worked with management to agree appropriate corrective action and timescale for improvement.

34. As part of governance arrangements between Oxfordshire County Council and the Hampshire Partnership/Integrated Business Centre (IBC), Hampshire provide annual assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control from the work carried out via the IBC. This is provided through a commissioned Service Organisation Controls review under ISAE 3402. (International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board –which provides a framework for reporting on the design and compliance with control objectives related to financial reporting). The report for 2022/23 concludes that the key financial system controls were suitably designed and operated effectively, with no exceptions noted.

35. Where Internal Audit identifies areas for improvement, management action plans are in place and are routinely monitored by the Internal Audit team and the Audit Working Group. Managers are required to provide positive assurance that actions have been implemented; performance on implementation is high, demonstrating that control weaknesses identified by Internal Audit are being addressed on a timely basis.

## **Financial Management Code ('FM Code')**

36. A key goal of the Financial Management Code of Practice (launched by CIPFA in November 2019) is to improve the financial resilience of organisations by embedding enhanced standards of financial management. In accordance with the CIPFA Financial Management (FM) Code, local authorities should disclose compliance with the FM Code in the AGS and identify any outstanding areas for improvement or change.
37. There are clear links between the FM Code and the Governance Framework, particularly with its focus on achieving sustainable outcomes. As set out in Annex 4, an assessment has been made of the Council's current compliance with the Code for 2022/23.
38. The assessment identified the Council's compliance for the year, and 16 of the 17 standards have been assessed as "Green" meaning that compliance can be evidenced. Further work is required for the first standard, and this is identified on the assessment as an "amber" rating. Proposed further actions to be taken to enhance compliance for this area have been included in the assessment.

## **Procurement**

39. The Contract Procedure Rules have been reviewed and refreshed in 2022 as part of the Constitution, to ensure that they fully reflect the operational requirements of the role. These are supported by the templates and processes in the Procurement Handbook, which covers all aspects of procurement and commissioning, and which again is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that they are relevant and comply with best practice.

## **Customer Feedback**

40. The Customer Feedback team within the Customer Service Centre are responsible for the Corporate & Statutory complaints processes, and the coordination of all requests for information that fall under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)/Environmental Information Regulations (EIR).
41. Statutory and Corporate Complaints – In 2022/2023, the council received 618 complaints (432 in 21/22). Time taken to respond to complaints within timescale remains an area for improvement. A number of initiatives are underway to improve the resolution, and they include the migration of the process to a new system, working closely with directorates to manage the workflow, enhanced reporting capability and ownership from a senior leadership perspective. The team work closely with Access & Disclosure Officers in Law and Governance to ensure a consistent approach and appropriate communication on Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) enquiries.

42. FOIA/EIR – currently being worked upon to migrate onto the FOI module of Information electronic case system. The process is managed by a dedicated FOI lead and utilisation of a sophisticated monitoring tool, which identifies breaches and delays in response. This is followed up by manual reminders. The team work closely with Access & Disclosure Officers in Law and Governance. The relevant teams work closely on cases where there is synergy.

## **Service Issues**

### **HR Policies and Procedures**

43. Following the need identified in 2022/23 in 2023/24 there will be an ongoing review of the Council's Human Resources (HR) policies and procedures, where specific policies will be reviewed and updated, and associated procedural/guidance documents will be refreshed/reviewed to support these policies.
44. The HR Policy Manager and wider HR & Organisational Development team are working together on driving policy development and process improvements at the Council. There will be a comprehensive review of the Council's HR policies ensuring that all HR policies support the council's Workforce Strategy, comply with employment law, promote leading employment practice, consistency of approach to people management, and are straightforward and easy to use.

### **Specific policy areas**

45. Twelve policies set out in the Action plan for 2023/24 have been prioritised based on organisational and workforce needs. As well as ensuring they support the Workforce strategy, the HR policies are priority where issues or gaps have been identified through HR, managers, union, and employee network meetings. The Domestic abuse - supporting policy and guidance has been identified as a priority to review in 2023 to assist in identifying and supporting victims of domestic abuse.

## **Capital Governance**

46. New governance was introduced in 2022/23 to provide clarity on decision making regarding entry of schemes into the Capital Programme, and the management and oversight of the Capital Programme. There are Capital Programme Boards established for Major Infrastructure, Highways, Property, and IT and Digital. These report monthly to the Strategic Capital Board (SCB).
47. The SCB has delegated authority from the Strategic Leadership Team to develop the capital and investment strategy and oversee the council wide capital programme to ensure it delivers to that strategy. The role of the Board is to ensure the capital programme provides value for money and reflects the strategic priorities of the Council. The SCB obtains assurance on the delivery of the Capital Programme and the outcomes from the Director of each capital Programme Board and reviews the overall performance and risk management through exception reporting with a focus on variations in time, scope, and cost.

## **Capital Programme**

48. Inflation within the construction sector – labour, materials, plant – is impacting upon the overall Capital Programme and especially Major Infrastructure delivery. Measures are in place to ensure that cost estimates received from the external market and also our internal Business Case funding allocations are built using the most recent inflation indices available (BCIS based). A wider external review of Major Infrastructure governance is also being commissioned to ensure OCC's programme is deliverable and that the risks to OCC are actively and accurately assessed.

## **Adult Social Care**

49. Oxfordshire became a Trailblazer authority working with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to help shape charging reform, positively contributing to the national reform agenda. An accelerated programme was established to implement Adult Social Care Reform within a project management structure to ensure readiness for early adoption of the reforms. The programme was reviewed following the pausing of charging reforms announced in November 2022. Learning and opportunities from being a Trailblazer have been incorporated into the broader Adult Social Care transformation programme.

50. Adult Social Care has initiated a project to oversee preparation for Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance. The Health and Care Act 2022 introduced a new duty for CQC to independently review and assess how local authorities are delivering their Care Act functions. The project board reports to the ASC Directorate Leadership Team and provides regular updates to the wider Council. Preparation will include the development/completion of a self-assessment that will highlight key strengths and opportunities that will inform future work in relation to Assurance readiness.

## **Children and Young Peoples Services**

51. Like many children's services across the country Oxfordshire's services have seen significant increases in requests for support. In addition, the cost of supporting a higher number of our children who have very complex needs, has contributed to the overspend in the service. The directorate has reviewed decision making for all placements now overseen and approved by a Deputy Director. Intensive work has taken place across the directorate on the challenges of managing complex, demand driven services within a defined budget. A number of key transformation activities are progressing (Commissioning of children homes) and will see real benefits during the next financial year. There is also a determination to actively learn from the Oxfordshire Way, which has managed well similar demand and budget challenges within adult's social care.

52. The service has continued its work in anticipation of an Ofsted Inspection, a 'mock' inspection was carried out in January 2023 and its findings contributed to the

improvement plan within the service. A review of project and programme support was carried out during the year and formal Transformation oversight arrangements put in place.

53. The support to children defined as 'SEND' has experienced increased demand and pressure and the service performance in delivering Education, Health and Care plans within the national 20 week target saw a significant deterioration. As a result, the Council committed an additional investment for its 2023-24 financial year. In addition, an improvement plan was put in place and additional scrutiny via the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee will monitor performance.

## **Conclusion**

54. The Council's governance arrangements are regarded as fit for purpose and will be monitored throughout 2023/24.

## ANNEX 1 - SIGNIFICANT GOVERNANCE ISSUES

### *Actions identified for 2022/23 - Update*

This is a review of the progress during 2022/23 on the priorities for that year. The actions identified were completed in-year

Actions that were planned for 2022/23	Original Timescale	Outcome
<p><b>Directorate Scheme of Delegation: Powers and Financial Powers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To review and update all outwardly facing documentation, as well as review the location of information.</li> </ul>	31 July 2022	<p>The updated Scheme of Delegation pages within the Constitution (7.1 and 7.2) updated on the Council's website.</p> <p>Directorate level Schemes of Delegation, which are held centrally, have been reviewed by representatives of each directorate and updated.</p> <p>Financial Powers: The schemes of delegation for each directorate are being reviewed. The Council has extended the original timeframe for completing these reviews and updated versions will be signed off by the Corporate Directors and the S151 Officer by 28 April 2023.</p>
<p><b>Cherwell-Oxfordshire Decoupling Programme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint Shared Services and Personnel Committee (JSSP) with revised terms of reference, to provide suitable oversight and decision-taking concerning the termination of the agreement.</li> <li>A Joint Officer Transition Working Group will oversee a programme of due diligence and service reviews is</li> </ul>	31 August 2022	Following Decoupling in 2022, Cherwell District Council and the Council agreed a way forward for continued provision of certain services between Cherwell District Council and the Council.

Actions that were planned for 2022/23	Original Timescale	Outcome
<p>underway, with the aim of keeping the best interests of residents at the centre of decision making.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where appropriate for each council, revised partnership arrangements will remain in-place within the framework of new agreements.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Constitution Review</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Constitution Working Group advised Committee that the timescale in which to produce an updated Constitution that is fit for purpose and understandable would not be achievable within the initial anticipated timescale of 31 March 2022.</li> <li>Committee agreed to extend the deadline for the review until July 2022.</li> <li>Update to be provided to Committee in due course.</li> </ul>	31 July 2022	The changes proposed by the Constitution Working Group were adopted by Council at the meeting on 7 October 2022. As reported to the Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting on 18 January 2023 the next stage of the review will take place once the Review requested by Council on 1 November 2022 to consider any change to its governance arrangements has been completed.
<p><b>Capital Programme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Governance has been reviewed for implementation throughout 2022/23</li> </ul>	31 March 2023	Completed.
<p><b>Data Subject Access Requests</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review resource to deal with data subject access requests in view of an increase in the numbers of requests being received.</li> </ul>	25 April 2022	Additional staff resources are in place to address the increased demand.



Actions that were planned for 2022/23	Original Timescale	Outcome
<b>Member Code of Conduct Training</b>	May 2022	A refresher training session for Members on the Code of Conduct was run on 21 April 2023. Further sessions will be arranged for 2023/24 to meet Members' needs.
<b>Information Governance Group/Board</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To review the reporting framework for the Information Governance Group (IGG), and Information Governance Board. Work on this is due to commence on 25 April 2022.</li> </ul>	16 May 2022	The terms of reference and membership of the Information Governance Group and Board have been reviewed.
<b>Risk Management Training</b>	September 2022	Risk management training was provided to members in June 2022, and to SLT in August 2022.

## ANNEX 2 - SIGNIFICANT GOVERNANCE ISSUES

### *Actions identified for 2023/24*

	Action now planned for 2023/24	Timescale for Completion	Outcome	Senior Responsible Officer
1	<p><b>Directorate Scheme of Delegation: Powers and Financial Powers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To review and update all outwardly facing documentation, as well as review the location of information.</li> </ul>	<p>31 August 2023</p> <p>30 September 2023</p> <p>30 September 2023</p>	<p>The updated Scheme of Delegation pages within the Constitution (7.1 and 7.2) updated on the Council's website.</p> <p>Directorate level Schemes of Delegation, which are held centrally, have been reviewed by representatives of each directorate and updated. A further review is required to reflect the recent changes in reporting arrangements.</p> <p>Financial Powers: The schemes of delegation for each directorate are reviewed. Updated versions will be signed off by the Corporate Directors and the S151 Officer</p>	<p>Simon Harper Head of Governance</p> <p>Simon Harper Head of Governance</p> <p>Ian Dyson Assistant Director of Finance</p>
2	<p><b>Cherwell-Oxfordshire Decoupling Programme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following Decoupling in 2022, Cherwell District Council and the Council agreed a way forward for continued provision of certain services between Cherwell District Council and the Council</li> </ul>	<p>6 October 2023</p>	<p>The decoupling arrangements for Regulatory Services are to be completed within the six months' notice period commencing 6 April 2023 and all legal documentation reflecting the arrangements prior to and after decoupling to be completed.</p>	<p>Anita Bradley Director of Law and Governance</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where appropriate for each council, revised partnership arrangements will remain in-place within the framework of new agreements.</li> </ul>			
<b>3.</b>	<p><b>HR policies to be reviewed and updated for 2023/2024</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Domestic abuse- supporting employees: policy and guidance (HR and Public Health)</li> <li>Sickness/supporting attendance policy and process maps</li> <li>Agile working policy</li> <li>Additions to pay policy (to include honorariums, market supplements)</li> <li>Capability policy and procedures</li> <li>Disciplinary policy and procedures</li> </ul>	<p>30 September 2023</p> <p>30 September 2023</p> <p>30 September 2023</p> <p>31 March 2024</p> <p>31 March 2024</p> <p>31 March 2024</p>	All HR policies support the council's Workforce Strategy, comply with employment law, promote leading employment practice, consistency of approach to people management, and are straightforward and easy to use	Michael Fletcher, Head of HR Business Partnering & Advisory, Nazia Turley, HR Policy Manager
<b>4.</b>	<b>Governance Policies and Procedures</b>	31 March 2024	All policies and procedures comply with the law, promote best practice, consistency of approach and are straightforward and easy to use	Simon Harper, Head of Governance

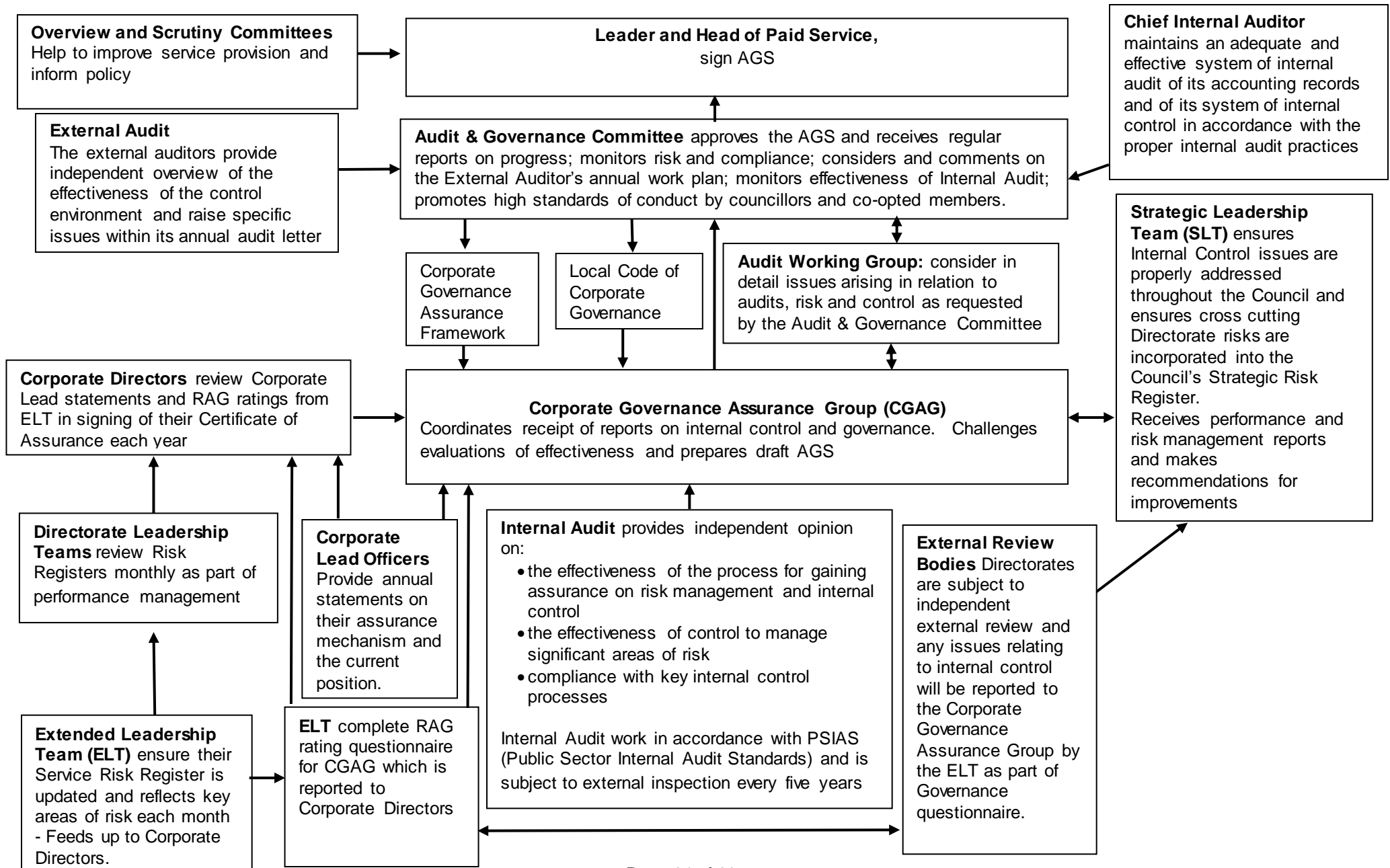
	<p>To review and update the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Register of interests</li> <li>• Gifts &amp; Hospitality</li> <li>• Member representation on Outside Bodies</li> <li>• Social Media for Members (as part of the Council's Main Social Media Policy)</li> <li>• Officer Guidance on executive decision making and key decisions.</li> </ul>			
<b>5.</b>	<p><b>Constitution</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reconvene the Constitution Working Group and continue the review of the Council's Constitution</li> </ul>	31 March 2024	A further report to Council to recommend changes to the Council's Constitution to improve the effectiveness of the governance arrangements within the Council	Anita Bradley Director of Law and Governance
<b>6.</b>	<p><b>Member training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide a further programme of Member training and briefings responding to the identified needs of Members.</li> <li>• To act upon evaluation of Member feedback following training events.</li> </ul>	31 March 2024	An improved and responsive training programme reflecting the evolving requirements of elected Members in 2023/24	Simon Harper, Head of Governance

7.	<p><b>Review of Members' and Officers' fiduciary responsibilities and accountability, and legal status in respect of outside bodies including indemnities.</b></p>	31 December 2023	The legal status of and responsibilities and accountabilities of Members are clearly understood in relation each outside body they are appointed to by the Council with appropriate indemnities in place.	Simon Harper, Head of Governance
8.	<p><b>Review of Customer Feedback</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer feedback via corporate and statutory complaints and Freedom of Information requests in very important to Oxfordshire County Council.</li> <li>• We will act to ensure that colleagues are fully aware of the importance placed upon responding in the appropriate timescales and that training, knowledge share and learning from customer feedback is promoted across the council.</li> </ul>	31 March 2024	Improved responsiveness to customer complaints within the corporate timescale.	Mark Haynes, Director for Customer Experience, Cultural and Property Services
9.	<p><b>Review the current culture of dealing with information requests and the expectations of the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Customer Feedback, and Governance Teams to review the</li> </ul>	31 March 2024	A joined-up approach to responding to Information requests which enables the Council to consistently meet the statutory requirements and reflects best practice	Mark Haynes, Director for Customer Experience, Cultural and Property Services Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and

	<p>joint working approach when dealing with requests for information under the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR), Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and Subject Access Request (SAR) regimes. Teams to meet regularly to ensure the Council is working in accordance with the relevant legislation and to consult with the ICO during the year to assist with the monitoring of the Council's performance.</p>			Monitoring Officer
10.	<b>Recording of Decisions</b>	30 September 2023	All key decisions and executive officer decisions are captured and recorded in a timely and transparent way.	Anita Bradley Director of Law and Governance
11.	<p><b>Proactive Training for Governance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Governance sessions to raise awareness and skills level within the Organisation to be carried out by Head of Legal.</li> </ul>	First session on 29 June 2023, with further roll out to SLT/CMT and SMF in 2023/24.	Increased confidence and awareness across the Council to comply with Governance policies and procedures	Paul Grant, Head of Legal

12.	<b>Review of the Annual Governance Statement Process</b>	31 August 2023	Improved process for tracking governance concerns and completing the Annual Governance Statement.	Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance, and Monitoring Officer, Simon Harper, Head of Governance
13.	<b>Financial Management Strategy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Financial Management Strategy is in development which will set out the improvements required to enhance financial management capabilities including financial management reporting structures and the development of business objects dashboard reporting</li> </ul>	31 August 2023	The Financial Management Strategy will be completed by the end of August 2023, and will include an improvement plan, timescale, and governance. The improvement plan will be cross cutting and will include enhancements and opportunities using technology and data for enabling more efficient and effective financial management across the Council.	Ian Dyson Assistant Director of Finance

## Annex 3: Overview of Corporate Governance Assurance Framework





## Annex 4: Financial Management Code of Practice – Summary Compliance Assessment 2022/23

Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
<b>1. Responsibilities of the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) and Leadership Team</b>				
A	The leadership team is able to demonstrate that the services provided by the authority provide value for money (VfM)	Services use benchmarking to inform opportunities to improve VfM but this is often ad hoc. Procurement decisions consider VfM by considering the quality of service and not just price.	Develop processes for evidencing VfM across services in a more systematic and consistent way, including benchmarking, as part of the Budget & Business Planning process.	<b>AMBER</b>
B	The authority complies with the CIPFA “Statement of the Role of the CFO in Local Government”	The CFO is qualified accountant with significant experience working as an active member of the council’s leadership team. The CFO is a member of SLT (Senior Leadership Team) and reports directly to the Chief Executive. The CFO has an influential role with members of the Cabinet, Audit & Governance Committee and lead opposition members.		<b>GREEN</b>
<b>2. Governance and Financial Management Style</b>				
C	The Leadership Team demonstrates in its actions and behaviours responsibility for governance and internal control	The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) understands its responsibilities in relation to Financial Management and considers the assessment against the Code and actions or further work required in order to continuously improve. SLT receive and review on a quarterly basis a report from the Chief Internal Auditor on progress against the Internal Audit Plan, implementation of agreed management actions and delivery of the Counter Fraud Plan. The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) and Action Plan are also considered by SLT. In addition, the Audit & Governance Committee have a key role in providing independent assurance over governance, risk and internal control arrangements.		<b>GREEN</b>

Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
D	The authority applies the CIPFA/SOLACE "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2016)"	The Local Code of Corporate Governance sets out how the Council complies with the requirements of the Framework and identifies key documents, which provide detailed information as to how the Council ensures the Corporate Governance principles are adhered to. The annual update of the Local Code of Corporate Governance was last approved by Audit & Governance Committee in May 2022.		GREEN
E	The Financial Management style of the authority supports financial sustainability	The Council last undertook a self-assessment against CIPFA's Financial Management style hierarchy back in 2018. The outcome identified that financial management was considered to be adequate. The Council has adopted a Business Partnering model that supports managers to deliver financially sustainable services by providing strategic advice and support. This is underpinned by a Corporate Function that manages the strategic financing issues and provides the budget setting and accounting framework for the organisation.	A Financial Management Strategy is in development which will set out the improvements required to enhance financial management capabilities including financial management reporting structures and the development of business objects dashboard reporting	GREEN
<b>3. Long to Medium-Term Financial Management</b>				
F	The authority has carried out a credible and transparent financial resilience assessment	An assessment has been undertaken of the 2021/22 Financial Resilience index compared to the other 23 County Councils. This is set out in in the Financial Strategy (section 4.5 of the Budget & Business Planning Report to Cabinet in January 2023). The Financial Strategy also includes a suite of measures against which financial performance is measured during the year including the forecast level of General Balances against the minimum risk assessed level for balances taking into account the latest monitoring position in the current year.		GREEN

Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
G	The authority understands its prospects for financial sustainability in the longer term and has reported this clearly to members	The Financial Strategy and MTFS outline the financial challenges and opportunities facing the Council over the medium and longer term. The Capital & Investment Strategy and the Capital Programme both cover a 10-year period. The Capital & Investment Strategy sets out the long-term context in which capital expenditure and investment decisions are made and articulates how the Council's capital investment will help achieve the Council's vision and priorities as well as respond to demographic change.	Develop scenario planning in relation to the longer term (to 2033/34)	GREEN
H	The authority complies with the CIPFA "Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities"	The Capital & Investment Strategy is updated annually and agreed by Council alongside the Capital Programme, Treasury Management Strategy, Annual Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy. The Capital Programme is monitored monthly with reports produced quarterly for the Strategic Capital Board and Cabinet. Quarterly Treasury Management reports are taken to Audit & Governance Committee, Cabinet and Council, including monitoring of Prudential Indicators.		GREEN
I	The authority has a rolling multi-year medium-term financial plan consistent with sustainable service plans	The Council has an integrated Business and Budget Planning Process with a multi-year MTFS linked to service plans and performance reporting through the Business Management & Monitoring Report.		GREEN
<b>4. The Annual Budget</b>				
J	The authority complies with its statutory obligations in respect of the budget setting process	The Council produces an annual balanced budget and supporting documentation within the necessary timeframe.		GREEN
K	The budget report includes a statement by the CFO on the robustness of the estimates and a statement on the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves	The CFO's Section 25 report accompanies the suite of Budget documents and includes a commentary on the adequacy of proposed financial reserves with reference to CIPFA's Resilience Index as well as assessed compliance with the FM Code.		GREEN

Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
<b>5. Stakeholder Engagement and Business Plans</b>				
L	The authority has engaged where appropriate with key stakeholders in developing its long-term financial strategy, medium-term financial plan and annual budget	<p>One of the Council's priorities has been to develop and implement a new consultation and engagement strategy, enhancing opportunities for residents, including young people and those seldom heard, to have their say in service development. This has been implemented for the 2023/24 budget process.</p> <p>Engagement and consultation on the council's priorities and budget has included a resident's survey, Oxfordshire Conversation events, a children's and young people sounding board. In addition, a public consultation on the budget proposals took place in November and December with the Performance &amp; Corporate Services Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee also considering and commenting upon the budget proposals ahead of the budget being agreed by Council.</p>		<b>GREEN</b>
M	The authority uses an appropriate documented options appraisal methodology to demonstrate the value for money of its decisions	Key decisions requiring investment to deliver service improvements, deliver savings or invest or save opportunities require business case to aid decision making via the appropriate governance process (e.g., Strategic Capital Board).	Review the requirements, standards and guidance for business cases including training options for responsible officers and decision makers.	<b>GREEN</b>
<b>6. Monitoring Financial Performance</b>				
N	The Leadership Team takes action using reports enabling it to identify and correct emerging risks to its budget strategy and financial sustainability	<p>The regular Business Management and Monitoring Reports to Cabinet include performance, finance and risk so enable the council's leadership team and Cabinet to respond to emerging issues and to take action to manage those.</p> <p>The regular Capital Programme monitoring report has been enhanced to better reflect performance and the delivery of outcomes linked to the completion of capital schemes.</p>	Continue to improve the visibility and links between performance, risk and finance reporting, highlighting key issues that need to be considered in the Business Management & Monitoring Report.	<b>GREEN</b>

Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
O	The Leadership Team monitors the elements of its balance sheet that pose a significant risk to financial sustainability	The Business Management and Monitoring Reports to Cabinet include monitoring of key balance sheet items including balances, reserves, debtors, and cash (including the performance of Treasury Management).		GREEN
<b>7. External Financial Reporting</b>				
P	The CFO has personal and statutory responsibility for ensuring that the statement of accounts produced by the local authority complies with the reporting requirements of the "Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom" (The Code)	The annual accounts are produced in compliance with The Code and have always received an unqualified audit opinion. Statutory deadlines for publication of the accounts have been consistently met until 2021/22 due to resourcing issues. The audit of the 2020/21 and 2021/22 accounts remains outstanding as at December 2022 due to the national issue regarding infrastructure assets for which a statutory override has recently been passed into legislation.		GREEN
Q	The presentation of the final outturn figures and variations from budget allows the leadership team to make strategic financial decisions	The council's leadership team and Cabinet consider the outturn and year end variances in a Provisional Outturn Report to Cabinet each June which enables strategic financial decisions to be made as necessary in a timely manner.		GREEN