

Division: **ALL**

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 15 January 2025

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2023/24 – UPDATE ON ACTIONS

Report by the Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to receive this update on the actions from the Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 and to make any comment upon them.**

Executive summary

2. On 17 July 2024, this Committee approved the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for the year 2023/24. Local authorities are required to prepare an AGS to be transparent about their compliance with good governance principles and to give an opinion on the effectiveness of those arrangements. As part of the process, authorities are expected to highlight areas of focus for the year following.
3. The Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer presented an update to Committee on 27 November 2024 on the seven areas of focus identified in the AGS 2023/24 for action in 2024/25. This report to Committee is therefore a report on only those actions where an additional update is required.

Annual Governance Statement actions for 2024/25

4. The seven actions were:

Service area	Action
A. Constitution Working Group	To establish a member working group to work alongside the officer working group
B. HR policies to be reviewed and updated for 2024/2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organisational Change policy• Redeployment policy• Redundancy procedure Fixed Term /Temporary contracts of employment policy• TUPE guidance Pensions and Retirement policy

C. Directorate level Schemes of Delegation	To continue with the review and update of the Directorate Schemes of Delegation.
D. Further consideration of the Information Commissioner's Office's (ICO) expectations when handling Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulation requests.	The Customer Feedback team (FOI Officers) to work with the Corporate Governance Team on increasing awareness within the Council on the correct application of the legislation; improving the handling and, the quality of responses, to requests.
E. Current CCTV & intruder alarm monitoring arrangements.	To review.
F. Members' and Officers' fiduciary responsibilities and accountability, and legal status in respect of outside bodies including indemnities.	To review.
G. Proactive Training for Governance	Governance sessions to raise awareness and skills level within the Organisation to be carried out by the Head of Governance and Head of Legal.

UPDATES

A. Constitution Working Group

5. The Constitution Working Group has been meeting on a regular basis since November 2024. The Constitution Working Group considers recommendations made by officers for changes to parts of the Constitution, and also proposes its own changes and areas of the Constitution for review. Officers meet to work on those Member's proposals and prepare amendments to the relevant parts of the Constitution as well as making recommendations of their own.
6. Amendments which are agreed by the Constitution Working Group will come forward to the Audit and Governance Committee for formal consideration and recommendation on to Council for approval. At its December meeting, Council considered and approved amendments to the Financial Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations which had followed this route. Other amendments to parts of the Constitution are anticipated to come to the next meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee.

B. HR Policies

7. Five of the six identified policies have been reviewed and published. Details of these policies were reported to Committee at the November 2024 meeting.
8. The Fixed Term/Temporary contracts of employment policy is pending approval. There was a delay in completing the review of this policy due to changes in organisational priority. Date for completion remains as January 2025, as reported to Committee in November 2024.

C. Directorate level Schemes of Delegation

9. The Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer has met with colleagues in HR and Finance to consider their updates to schemes of delegation which will form the greater part of individual Directorate schemes. This will enable the production of a pro forma scheme of delegation which can be provided to individual Directorates and meetings will then be arranged for Governance officers and Directors/Deputy Directors as necessary to support them in producing final schemes of delegation.

D. Further consideration of the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) expectations when handling Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulation requests.

10. No further update, please refer to the previous report presented to the Committee on 27 November 2024.

E. Full review of current CCTV & intruder alarm monitoring arrangements.

11. No further update, please refer to the previous report presented to the Committee on 27 November 2024.

F. Review of Members' and Officers' fiduciary responsibilities and accountability, and legal status in respect of outside bodies including indemnities.

12. As reported in November 2024, this will be reviewed by 31 March 2025.

G. Proactive Training for Governance

13. In addition to the update presented to Committee on 27 November 2024, key officers have been booked onto CIPFA's Whistleblowing eLearning training. Colleagues have been asked that they aim to complete the training by 31 January 2025. Completion will be overseen by line managers, and the

Governance Team will hold a central record for all officers.

14. Invitations will shortly be sent out to Members for a training session in January/February 2025 to provide an update on Members' Interests, Bias and Predetermination and the Government's consultation on a national standards regime.

Financial implications

15. There are no direct financial implications directly relating to, or arising from, the recommendation in this report.

Checked by: Drew Hodgson, Strategic Finance Business Partner
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Legal implications

16. The Council has a legal duty to agree an Annual Governance Statement. This report does not itself raise legal implications but is an update on the actions arising from last year's AGS and is consistent with the responsibility of this Committee to ensure the effectiveness of the Council's governance.

Checked by: Paul Grant, Head of Legal, & Deputy Monitoring Officer
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Equality and inclusion implications

17. The recommendations in this report do not themselves raise equality implications. However, the effectiveness and inclusivity of the Council's governance arrangements are integral to the effective running of the Council and of the outcomes for the community.

Anita Bradley

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January 2025