

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda
Item No.

Report of Chief Executive & Town Clerk

to

Audit Committee

on

25 June 2014

Report prepared by: Tim MacGregor, Policy & Governance
Manager

Annual Governance Statement 2013/14

Executive Councillor – Councillor Woodley

A Part 1 Public Agenda Item

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present to Audit Committee the Council's Annual Governance Statement for 2013/14 together with actions for 2014/15 and an update on progress made with the 2013/14 related actions.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **That Audit Committee approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2013/14, subject to any further views expressed by External Audit and recommends it to the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive for authorisation and signature.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The responsibility for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control rests with the Council. It is required to report on this annually via its Governance Statement which is published with the financial statements.
- 3.2 In order to do this, the Council should seek regular assurance that its system of internal control are functioning effectively. It should also ensure that the system of internal control is effective in managing significant risks in the way that it would expect.
- 3.3 The Council has delegated responsibility for monitoring and reporting on the adequacy and effectiveness of its system of internal control to the Audit Committee.
- 3.4 The Annual Governance Statement 2013/14 and action plan for 2014/15 is attached at **Appendix 1**. Progress against the 2013/14 actions is outlined in **Appendix 2**.
- 3.5 The Annual Governance Statement for South Essex Homes (SEH) was considered by the SEH Audit Committee on 21 May and endorsed by SEH Board on 9 June 2014 and is attached at **Appendix 3**.

- 3.6 In appraising the Annual Governance Statement members of Audit Committee should take into account:
- That the Audit Committee has acted in accordance with its terms of reference, that members attendance was regular and that training and development of members was undertaken to enable them to fulfil their role.
 - That the statement reflects the evidence seen by members during the course of their duties and that it reflects their experience in undertaking other roles as Councillors, including as members of Scrutiny Committees.
- 3.7 Managers Assurance Statements have been signed by all Heads of Service as a self-assessment of whether the council's key business management processes have been operating effectively and consistently across 14 key business management processes. A summary of the findings is attached at **Appendix 4**, highlighting the need for testing the Business Continuity Planning arrangements that have been developed during 2013/14.
- 3.8 The Good Governance Group of senior officers has met quarterly to review the Council's governance processes, to ensure they are fit for purpose and comply with good practice requirements and ensure that sufficient assurance is available throughout the year to support the production of the Annual Governance Statement.

4. Further governance issues

The Council, along with many other local authorities, faces a range of challenges in relation to future governance arrangements as a result of the changing landscape of local service delivery, national/local government relationships and new funding arrangements. Notable examples include:

- **Closer integration of health and social care:** The growing political consensus that closer integration between the sectors can lead to significant improvements in service delivery and resource savings, raises a range of issues of accountability and responsibility in terms of the council working with local health partners, NHS England and the Department of Health.
- **Local Enterprise Partnerships:** Acting as informal partnerships to support economic growth, with the potential to access significant government, EU and private sector resources, LEPs have relatively un-prescribed governance arrangements. Led by the business sector and with a 50/50 private/public membership, lines of democratic accountability and responsibility arguably remain ambiguous.
- **New service and funding arrangements.** The changing role of councils from direct service providers to enablers/commissioners will see greater emphasis on their role in terms of collaboration, partnership and persuasion, as well as requiring new working arrangements, which may lack clarity, particularly in the early stages of development.

The 'Fulfilling lives: A Better Start' Big Lottery bid, a £30-40m project over 10 years to improve outcomes for children from pre-birth to age 3, is an example of this. The project, requiring considerable council focus and resource, sees the money awarded to partnerships, led by voluntary sector organisations, and overseen by the Health and Wellbeing Board acting as a Better Start Area Partnership Board.

- **Move to multi-party/group politics.** The trend to multi-party/group politics, confirmed by recent local and European elections and leading to a greater likelihood of no group having a majority on many councils brings new challenges in ensuring decision making remains effective.

These issues are likely to pose significant governance challenges for the Council, particularly in relation to issues of accountability, the role of local democracy and reporting lines – for which there may be no clear short term answers.

5. Corporate Implications

5.1 Contribution to Council's Aims and Priorities

Operating robust governance arrangements contributes to the delivery of all Council aims and priorities.

5.2 Financial Implications

All officers have been required to adopt robust financial management arrangements within their service areas.

5.3 Legal Implications

Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011 Section 4 requires that the relevant body must conduct a review at least once in a year of the effectiveness of its system of internal control.

The findings of the review must be considered by Council or by a committee. Following the review, the body or committee must approve an annual governance statement prepared in accordance with proper practices in relation to internal control.

Proper practice in this sense is defined as guidance issued by the relevant professional body, which for local government is the CIPFA / SOLACE Framework This requires local authorities to produce a Local Code of Governance and sets out the operational framework that it should adopt.

Therefore, the work undertaken to support and produce the Annual Governance Statement satisfies the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011.

5.4 People

All Members and staff have been required to adopt the principles and values outlined in the Local Code of Governance and staff ensuring the business management processes required within their service areas are applied.

5.5 Property Implications

All services have been required adopt proper processes in managing their assets.

5.6 Consultation

The Corporate Management Team has agreed all supporting reports and the Annual Governance Statement.

5.7 Equalities Impact Assessment

This has been reflected in the principles, values and business management processes adopted.

5.8 Risk Assessment

Failure to operate robust governance arrangements can potentially lead to poor management, performance, stewardship of public money, public engagement and ultimately, poor outcomes for citizens and service users. It increases the risk that corporate priorities won't be delivered.

5.9 Value for Money, Community Safety Implications and Environmental Impact

These have been reflected in the principles, values and or business management processes adopted.

6 Background Papers

6.1 Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) / Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) publication: Delivering Good Governance in Local Government - Framework.

6.2 Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) / Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) publication: Guidance Note for English Authorities – 2012.

6.3 The CIPFA Finance Advisory Network, The Annual Governance Statement, meeting the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003, Incorporating Accounts and Audit (Amendment) (England) Regulation 2006, Rough Guide for Practitioners.

6.4 The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011.

7 Appendices

Appendix 1 - Annual Governance Statement 2013/14 incorporating Corporate Governance Action Plan 2014/15.

Appendix 2 - Corporate Governance Action Plan, 2014/15, progress report.

Appendix 3 - South Essex Homes Annual Governance Statement – 2013/14

Appendix 4 – Summary of Managers Assurance Statements for 2013/14.