

**1. Scope of responsibility**

- 1.1 Southend-on-Sea City Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently, and effectively. The Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.
- 1.2 In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for ensuring the proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs and facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, including arrangements for the management of risk, are in place. This responsibility extends to satisfying itself that there are robust governance arrangements between the Council and its subsidiaries.
- 1.3 The Council approved and adopted an updated [Local Code of Governance](#) in December 2019, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government. A copy of the Council's code is part of the Council's Constitution and is available on the Council's [website](#) or can be obtained from the Corporate Strategy Group, Civic Centre, Victoria Avenue, SS2 6ER.
- 1.4 This Annual Governance Statement explains how the Council has complied with the Code and meets the requirements of Section 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 in relation to the production and publication of an Annual Governance Statement.

**2. The purpose of the Annual Governance Statement**

- 2.1 The governance framework comprises the structures, systems, processes, culture, and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and the activities through which it is accountable to, engages with, and leads the community. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate services and value for money.
- 2.2 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 achieve 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 on-going process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the 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.
- 2.3 The governance framework has been in place at the Council for the year ended 31 March 2022 and up to the date of approval of the annual statement of accounts.

### 3. The Council's Governance Framework

3.1 The governance framework ensures the Council's ambition and desired outcomes are effectively promoted and progressed through its corporate governance arrangements and business planning processes. The key business process elements of the governance framework are as follows:

**Citizens:**

- Community participation
- Co-design and co-production with citizens
- Customer satisfaction
- Consultation and engagement
- Complaints, compliments, and comments

**Performance:**

- Outcome based strategy and business planning
- Decision making / constitution
- Policy framework and procedures
- Performance management, including data quality
- Risk management, whistleblowing
- Business continuity
- Information security
- Contract management
- Project management
- Change / transformation management

**Resources:**

- Outcome based financial planning and reporting, budgetary control, and treasury management
- Commissioning
- Procurement
- Asset Management
- Fraud & Corruption and Insurance
- Value for Money

**People:**

- Workforce management & development
- Values and behaviours - codes of conduct for members and staff
- Staff performance management
- Health and safety
- Ethical governance

3.2 These areas form the main sources of assurance to be considered in any review of the Council's governance arrangements.

3.3 The Chief Executive has the responsibility for overseeing the implementation and monitoring of the Local Code of Governance, through a process which includes:

- Regular reports to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and the Audit Committee which set out:
  - weaknesses identified in the governance arrangements and
  - any corrective action necessary to resolve concerns identified;

- An annual review of the governance framework undertaken by the officer Good Governance Group;
- An annual report to the Corporate Management Team and the Audit Committee on the adequacy of governance arrangements; and
- A regular review of 'The Local Code of Governance', with any significant amendments reported to the Audit Committee, endorsed by Cabinet, and approved by Council.

3.4 The Council's key governance and business planning processes are also subject to audit on a risk assessed basis. Such work completed during the year forms part of the evidence in support of the Head of Internal Audit's annual opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's system of internal control.

3.5 Key elements of the Local Code of Governance are outlined below:

3.6 The Council's Monitoring Officer is responsible for the maintenance of the Constitution and for reviewing its relevance and effectiveness, ensuring that it is fit for purpose at all times. Any changes to the Constitution are approved by full Council. Minor changes can also be made to the Constitution by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Group Leaders and the Monitoring Officer.

3.7 The Council operates a Leader and Cabinet model of governance, with the Leader (appointed by Full Council for a four-year term) appointing up to 9 other Councillors to form the Cabinet. Cabinet currently has 7 portfolio holders plus the Leader. Cabinet is responsible for the majority of functions of the Council within the budget and policy framework set by full Council. Executive decisions are taken by the Cabinet collectively or by officers acting under delegated powers, depending upon the significance of the decision being made. For urgent issues, a chief officer can take a decision in consultation with the relevant portfolio holder, which will then be reported to the whole Cabinet at the earliest opportunity.

3.8 Following the May 2021 election, the Council returned no overall political control and continued to operate a Joint Administration. Led by a Labour Leader, the Administration was made up of 14 Labour members, 7 from the Independent Group and 5 from the Liberal Democrats. The Conservative Group held 23 seats and 2 non-aligned independent members were in place. The 2021/22 municipal year saw two unsuccessful votes of no confidence in the Leader of the Council, during the months leading up to the 2022 May election. A greater number of Special Cabinet meetings took place in 2021/22 increasing the flow of business and support mechanisms around these meetings. The regular occurrence of change and the annual preparation for election periods continues to present challenges and risks to the sustainability of longer-term service and financial planning. 2021/22 also saw changes within the Senior Management Team including a new Chief Executive and new Executive Directors and Directors, for which most roles saw the progression of existing and experienced officers promoted into more senior positions. The current Chief Executive who was acting up into this role is overseeing a new recruitment campaign for a permanent appointment. The local election in May 2022, returned results with a working majority for the Joint Administration. A vote at the subsequent Southend Labour Group meeting resulted in a new Leader of the Council for the coming municipal year.

- 3.9 The Council has three Scrutiny Committees which review and scrutinise proposed decisions in their respective areas of responsibility – People, Place and Policy & Resources. The committees review and scrutinise decisions made, or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the Council’s functions. In accordance with the Health and Social Care Act 2012, the People Scrutiny Committee also scrutinises health matters.
- 3.10 Decisions made by the Cabinet may be called in to a Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the provisions of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules.
- 3.11 The Council operates a pre-Cabinet scrutiny system where scrutiny and opposition councillors are given opportunities to contribute to and offer advice on key decisions prior to consideration by Cabinet. This is achieved by reports to Scrutiny Committees and the outcomes of cross-party working groups.
- 3.12 The Council has a Standards Committee to promote and maintain high ethical standards of conduct for elected and co-opted committee members. A key role of the Committee is to help oversee the councillors’ Code of Conduct and to monitor the effectiveness of the councillors’ Code of Conduct. The Standards Committee also deals with formal complaints against councillors. In March 2022, the Council adapted a new code of conduct.
- 3.13 The Council has begun to operate a development and training programme for councillors to help support them in their strategic roles. This bespoke offer has been designed with councillors to support robust and effective decision making within a strong governance framework and will enhance councillors aim for high performing and professional relationships. More information is provided at paragraph 5.13.
- 3.14 A local authority has a duty to ensure that it is fulfilling its responsibility for adequate and effective risk management, control, and governance. To this end, the Council has in place an Audit Committee. The Audit Committee has a key role in overseeing and assessing the risk management, control, and corporate governance arrangements and advising the Council on the adequacy and effectiveness of these arrangements.
- 3.15 The Council’s major policy objectives and priorities are outlined in the ‘Southend 2050 Roadmap’, which outlines how the Council is contributing towards delivering the ambition for the City to 2050, five related themes and the 26 desired outcomes that are reviewed annually. Reports outlining progress against key areas of delivery (Outcome Success Measures Report) are reviewed by the Corporate Management Team, Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees. This process will be enhanced in 2022/23 through the move to a four yearly Corporate Plan, the development of which is currently progressing through the Cabinet cycle.
- 3.16 Regular integrated financial monitoring reports covering both revenue and capital projects are produced that provide analysis and explanations of any significant variances from approved budgets. A forecast outturn for the year is also developed and considered by Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committees. A five-year Medium Term Financial Plan is refreshed annually and shaped by the priorities agreed by the Council. The Council has also developed a Financial Sustainability Strategy providing a 10-year horizon. The Council’s annual budget process is subject to engagement, consultation, and scrutiny by all interested stakeholders. Formal public Scrutiny Committees take place at the end of January, prior to consideration

by Cabinet and decision by full Council on the overall budget package in February. This enables a robust, costed, and balanced, budget to be set. The overall budget development and approval arrangements complies with good practice and helps to ensure that the Council remains financially resilient.

- 3.17 The Council operates a five-year capital investment programme, with the application of a 'gateway review' process, enabling items on a reserved list to be subject to further and proportionate consideration before being included in the programme. This, among other things, enables consideration of levels of required resourcing to be applied to projects (both in terms of affordability and the capacity of the organisation to deliver them), alignment with the Southend 2050 and recovery priorities and support for a more outcome focussed approach.
- 3.18 The Corporate Risk Register is reviewed regularly by the Corporate Management Team, and by the Cabinet every six months. Project risk and departmental risk registers are reviewed by service area management teams.
- 3.19 The Council engages with its communities within a consultation, engagement and participation framework that increasingly harnesses co-design, co-production, and asset-based community development principles, with outputs integrated into business planning and delivery as is the case with the Health and Wellbeing Panel and development of Adult Social Care Strategies. Co-production activity through a test and learn approach will be evaluated by the Adults and Communities Senior Management Team and supported by Working Together for Change, an organisation working alongside councils and health organisations to improve citizen led change to public services.
- 3.20 The Council has a Health and Safety Policy, with an accompanying assurance mechanism and action plan that is reviewed quarterly via the Corporate Management Team and Divisional Management Teams. This approach has recently been refreshed to support the learning from the Pandemic and to assist the Council in maintaining Level 5 (out of 5) diamond award on the RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) Quality Safety Award assessment.
- 3.21 A complaints procedure and a whistleblowing policy are maintained and kept under review to enable issues to be raised by public, staff, councillors, and co-opted Members, when they feel appropriate standards have not been met. A report analysing complaints, comments and compliments is submitted to Cabinet and Council annually.

#### **4. Role of the Chief Financial Officer**

- 4.1 The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) occupies a key position in managing the Councils' finances and ensuring that resources are used wisely to secure positive results and desired outcomes. To support the post holder in the fulfilment of their duties, and ensure the Council has access to effective financial advice, in 2016 the Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants (CIPFA) issued an updated statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government. The statement:

- Sets out how the requirements of legislation and professional standards should be fulfilled by CFOs in the carrying out of their role, and

- Includes five key principles that define the core activities and behaviours that belong to the role of the CFO in public service organisations and the organisational arrangements needed to support them.

#### 4.1.1 These principles are:

- The CFO in a local authority is a key member of the leadership team, helping it to develop and implement strategy and to resource and deliver the Council's strategic objectives sustainably and in the public interest;
- The CFO in a local authority must be actively involved in, and able to bring influence to bear on, all material business decisions to ensure immediate and longer-term implications, opportunities and risks are fully considered, and aligned with the Council's overall financial strategy;
- The CFO in a local authority must lead the promotion and delivery by the whole authority of good financial management so that public money is safeguarded at all times and used appropriately, economically, efficiently, and effectively;
- The CFO in a local authority must lead and direct a finance function that is resourced to be fit for purpose; and
- The CFO in a local authority must be professionally qualified and suitably experienced.

4.2 The Council has the necessary arrangements and procedures in place which ensure that these principles are complied with. This is through a combination of direct compliance by the CFO and, where not directly complied with, ensuring there are alternative procedures in place to make sure that the necessary outcomes and objectives are still achieved, and suitable controls are in place. For example, this may include deputising arrangements and delegated authority for financial management in the clearance of relevant reports to councillors.

4.3 The Chief Finance Officer is responsible for ensuring that the annual Statement of Accounts is prepared in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting In The United Kingdom. Due to the resourcing and capacity challenges that our external auditors have experienced over the last 12 months, the independent external audit of the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts has not yet been finalised. Whilst this is not a reflection on the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements or on the quality of the draft Statement of Accounts, it does mean that the Council and its partners and stakeholders do not yet have the assurances they seek from a fully audited and unqualified signed set of accounts for 2020/21. Also, during 2022/23 the Council's finance team will now have to manage the finalisation of the independent external audit for both the 2020/21 and 2021/22 financial years. Discussions for planning this programme of activity are ongoing with the external audit team.

## 5. Review of effectiveness

- 5.1 The Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by; the work of the Senior Leadership Group, work undertaken by the Good Governance Group, the Head of Internal Audit's annual report, and by comments made by external auditors and other external agencies and inspectorates. The Council has also undertaken an evidenced based self-assessment against each of the 17 standards contained within the new CIPFA Financial Management Code (see below, 5.33).
- 5.2 The year 2021/22 has seen the Council move beyond its initial response to the Covid-19 pandemic and emergency planning, with many of the Council's civil contingency arrangements being stood down. The second half of the year was dominated by the aftermath of the shocking death of a local MP, which not only impacted the local community but many councillors and staff members who had worked alongside Sir David Amess for many years, and the subsequent transition of the town into a city has presented opportunities to consider how the place and Council can grow and develop to maximise the opportunities that this new status brings.
- 5.3 The majority of staff continue to work remotely, a vision for 'Work Smart' our hybrid working framework is being developed, enabled by our Digital Smart Strategy and Facilities Management Strategy.
- 5.4 The Council's Covid-19 Local Outbreak Control Plan (LOCP) was replaced with a Local Outbreak Management Plan in March 2021 in line with changing circumstances. In March 2022, all the temporary flexibilities that enabled the public sector to respond to the pandemic through the Coronavirus Act 2020 expired. The national strategy shifted from management to the publication of Government's Living with Covid policy paper. As a result, the Council's plan has been refreshed on the basis on what is required to be done locally.
- 5.5 From April 2022, the Health Protection Board has a wider remit to include all health hazards and infectious diseases, as well as screening and immunisation. In May 2022, the equivalent member led Oversight and Outbreak Board decided to retain its existence and will continue to support the Health Protection Board, under the new name of the Health Protection, Oversight and Engagement Board.
- 5.6 The May 2021 Borough and Police & Crime Commissioner elections posed huge logistical challenges to ensure the democratic process could continue, while the safety of all concerned remained paramount. This included: risk assessments and careful planning for all premises being used; revised layouts to polling stations and count centre to enable social distancing; additional equipment (pencils, masks, screens, sanitisers etc..) being purchased; restrictions on numbers allowed at the count and special arrangements for briefings to candidates and election staff. These measures, among many others, enabled the elections to proceed successfully, including having a turnout that was in line with previous elections.

- 5.7 In October 2021, longstanding local MP Sir David Amess was violently murdered during a constituency surgery meeting. His death and the circumstances in which he died shook the local community, affecting many officers and councillors who had worked with Sir David over many years. The Council implemented contingency planning to support the community in coming together to pay their respects to Sir David as well as hosting national news agencies and central government visits. The Council worked alongside the Amess family and government Westminster for the funeral and commemorative arrangements.
- 5.8 In the time leading up to Sir David's death he Chaired the City Status Bid Committee, supported by the Council. Following his death, and the announcement that Southend would be awarded city status, this committee developed into a partnership with the Council, local business, and community groups to plan a suite of commemorative and celebratory activities during the first year of city status. Council activity has included the temporary resource of a project manager to oversee a financial budget, support in the planning of events as well as the development of a community grant scheme for local celebrations. The community fund went live in May 2022 and is being administered by the Community Investment Board support by the Southend Association of Voluntary Services.
- 5.9 Following Sir David's death all public meetings were suspended until after his funeral. With the temporary absence of Cabinet, Council and Scrutiny meetings during this time, key decisions were postponed having the effect of a compacted second half of the financial year. This was with exception of the Development Control Committee which continued to meet and take decisions.
- 5.10 On 3 February 2022, the Council held a parliamentary constituency of Southend West by-election. The election was uncontested by the major parties and the seat won by Conservative member Anna Firth. The Council has been in regular contact with Ms Firth since this time, liaising on local matters including collaborating on city and Platinum Jubilee celebrations.
- 5.11 On 2nd March 2022, Southend and the Council received a royal visit from the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall who presented the Council with the letters patent formally making Southend a city. At the same meeting, members voted to change the name of the Council and granted Sir David the first Freeman of the city posthumously. The Council worked alongside partners, faith leaders and community groups to ensure the royal visit and week-long city celebrations were a collective public display of respect and pride for Sir David and the place we live, work, and enjoy.
- 5.12 On 4th March 2022, the Council held a further by-election in the Southchurch Ward following the resignation of Cllr Alex Bright. The Southend Conservative Group held the seat and Cllr Darryl Jones was elected.

- 5.13 The councillor development programme, being co-designed with councillors, to equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to be an effective 21st century councillor has continued to develop. The action plan developed following the Council's refresh of the Protocol on Councillor/Officer relations, continues to support enhanced working relations, and has seen additional activity with improvements to the dedicated members support hub (to improve handling of members enquiries); an improved induction programme; improvements to councillor's ICT requirements; more political awareness training for officers; a buddy system where senior officers support all newly elected members, and opportunities for better understanding respective roles and how these can be mutually supportive. These measures will support effective working relationships between councillors and officers and this work continues to be reviewed and enhanced for ongoing effectiveness.
- 5.14 Five reports were called-in from the Cabinet or referred directly for scrutiny by the People Scrutiny Committee. Twenty reports were called-in or referred to the Place Scrutiny Committee for review and sixteen reports were called-in or referred directly to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.
- 5.15 The draft General Fund Revenue and Capital Budget for 2022/23 to 2026/27 was referred directly to each of the scrutiny committees by the Cabinet for review, as was the annual Comments, Complaints and Compliments report for 2020/21, the review of the Corporate Risk Register and the annual review and refresh of the Southend 2050 outcomes and roadmap milestones. An update on the action being taken by the Council in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to support local residents and businesses, was also referred directly to each of the scrutiny committees by the Cabinet.
- 5.16 A single joint in-depth scrutiny project on behalf of the People Scrutiny Committee, the Place Scrutiny Committee and the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee was commenced in July 2021 as part of the scrutiny work programme for the municipal year, on the theme of 'Enabling Councillors to be Effective.'
- 5.17 The Council's Future Ways of Working programme was embedded as the sixth Southend 2050 theme, with 9 workstreams: enabling a refocus on priorities, delivery at pace with a view to putting more resource and structure behind the drive for change. This included:
- Embedding the Council's refreshed set of **values and behaviours** through performance and development conversations' (staff appraisals);
  - A revamped **staff induction** programme;
  - Delivery of a 2-year transformational leadership development programme for officers and councillors, including a mentoring programme, action learning sets, coaching support, training for leading high performing teams;
  - Implementation of MeLearning and the **Knowledge Hub** - on-line training & development portals enabling staff to access essential e- learning and over 2000 bite size learning resources which cover a range of resources e.g. personal development, leadership effectiveness and wellbeing;
  - A staff led revision of the council's approach to **reward and recognition**; and
  - Progressing hybrid working through a Work Smart programme previously referred to as '**worklife**', advocating more flexible work arrangements building on the premise that 'work is what you do – not where you do it',

providing creative workspaces, hot desking, remote working and providing a service design 'lab' to help creative thinking and minimise hierarchical and practical constraints. This work is transforming into the new SCC Work Smart hybrid working framework.

- 5.18 The Service Design Team supported the council by implementing agile and co-design principles, ensuring the end user is involved in design challenges. This approach was used, for example, with Enforcement services, SEND local offer, various application processes, Business Support Review, PA redesign, members enquiries amongst many other smaller projects. In addition, a full-scale Service Design Academy programme was piloted with staff that exceeded expected outcomes.
- 5.19 The Business Support Review has revealed some areas of learning in relation to how redesigns in the council can be improved going forward. This includes how people are engaged on process and a review of key HR policy that are relied upon.
- 5.20 The Service Design Team are currently undertaking a review of project management activity across the Council, including identifying strengths, weaknesses, risks, and opportunities around project management activity, and developing proposed options for a revised Project Management Office (PMO) style solution. This will be central to the wider change programme within the Council and has significant alignment to the forthcoming governance, performance management and the wider corporate plan strategies. This work is currently still in its discovery phase and as such is in development. Further developments and the first iteration are expected in the autumn 2022.
- 5.21 Officer governance arrangements have continued to evolve, including in relation to officer boards introduced to focus on commissioning and investment and which help drive decisions on the use of resources for the Southend 2050 priorities. Following the introduction of the officer boards, the Council is undertaking a review of the effectiveness of the current governance framework and supporting structures and arrangements in the context of the delivery of strategic objectives and current situation. Outputs of the review process will be delivered in autumn 2022.
- 5.22 A review of the Council's Constitution commenced in March 2021. Bevan Brittan solicitors were commissioned to carry out an initial review and reflect upon where the Constitution may be improved to better reflect how the Council wishes to operate. Following this review, the General Purposes Committee agreed to provide all members with the opportunity to engage in conversations supported by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) about which aspects of the Constitution may be changed. The CfGS met with each party group to discuss the working practices of the Constitution, providing learning and best practice from elsewhere, prior to facilitating cross party workshops in order to establish consensus on changes. The work is ongoing and the CfGS is due to report their findings and recommendations in summer 2022.
- 5.23 Changes are expected to include a rewrite of the Constitution, with the aim of using plain English, reordering, and removing duplication and making the document more accessible. Other changes may include opportunities to enhance timely decision making.

- 5.24 The Council has reviewed its Social Value Policy with the aim to ensure that more effective social value is extracted from contracts. The new policy creates a greater model of oversight, assurance, and accountability through enhanced performance monitoring; both on performance of the policy through the Commissioning Board and the social value obtained from contracts which will be reported publicly. Contract Managers will be supported with additional training and officers have been invited to take part in shaping the associated toolkit. A Cabinet portfolio member will also be identified to champion the work.
- 5.25 Vecteo (a joint venture company between Southend-on-Sea City Council and London Hire Community Services commenced the direct delivery of home to school transport services for SEND children in September 2021. They had run this service successfully for the previous 12 months by managing subcontractors. However, changes were made to move from the subcontracted supply chain to a significant proportion of direct delivery by the company. This change was made without sufficient implementation of effective controls and governance that would normally have been expected by the Council, and there were significant and serious service failings in the first few weeks. As a result, the Council intervened and prevented Vecteo from rolling out a broader service offering. This allowed the serious service quality issues to be resolved first. The Council seconded its contract management team to Vecteo for a number of weeks to support the company with planning and scheduling issues.
- 5.26 The service significantly improved during the first month of intervention but there continued to be some inconsistencies in overall service quality for the remainder of the year. The company is working to improve the arrangements and to deliver more consistency in the quality of service provided and value for money. To ensure the immediate required improvements were delivered the Council established a weekly Gold command meeting with senior officers to monitor progress and respond to any escalated or outstanding matters. The Council also commissioned a customer satisfaction survey as well as a lessons learnt review and a contract compliance audit in order to provide ongoing assurance and opportunities for learning. Changes have been made to the Directors on the Board to increase the operational and financial management, and the Council and the company are now working together to address the improvements required and to bring the service onto a sustainable operational and financial footing.
- 5.27 The Council's waste management contract is due for renewal and work has been undertaken to identify the optimum solution to attempt to meet the climate emergency, recycling, and financial sustainability issues, to deliver best value for money for taxpayers. The issue featured prominently in the election campaigns reflecting the political desire to maintain weekly collections. As a result, arriving at an agreed way forward has proved to be more challenging than expected, however an approach to procurement that should be able to meet the expectations of all stakeholders has now been agreed and is being worked through.
- 5.28 The Better Queensway project is a transformational housing-led town centre regeneration project in the centre of Southend, focussed on delivering better housing and a better place, through high quality design, a high standard of development and environmental sustainability. The project aims to deliver a new mixed-use redevelopment for the area adjacent to the town centre that requires regeneration for the benefit of both people and place.

- 5.29 In view of the complexities of both developing the project and procuring a joint venture partner, the Council engaged external specialists to manage and oversee the project. This included extensive legal, financial, project development and delivery expertise as well as external specialist audit work aimed at supporting the Council's Corporate Procurement team. This thorough due diligence approach to manage and oversee the project aimed to supplement and optimise the council's in-house capacity and expertise, as well as supply independent challenge and assurance over project and procurement processes.
- 5.30 However, despite this due diligence, errors were made in the published procurement documents potentially mis-informing bidders about the Council's requirements, although clarification was provided during dialogue with potential bidders. Legal advice obtained and followed during the dialogue process resulted in a comprehensive and appropriate process being applied, supported by the Council's procurement team.
- 5.31 Errors in subsequent reports to Cabinet and the Shareholder Board which covered the features of Swan Housing's proposed highways scheme, as it evolved, had the potential to be misunderstood by councillors and cause confusion over the originally agreed intention. This contributed to significant debate about the intended solution as the proposal to be taken forward for planning consent was being determined and approved.
- 5.32 The Council recognises that robust arrangements that demonstrate transparency and accountability are key to support a proper decision-making process and maintaining trust between councillors and officers. As such, lessons learnt from managing the most complex regeneration project the Council has undertaken for many years is important for councillors and officers to embrace in working to deliver the Council's overall vision of 'working to make lives better'. Ongoing workshops including members and officers, as part of the transformational leadership development programme, is helping to support more effective working relationships.
- 5.33 The Council undertook a self-assessment against the six core principles and 17 standards contained within **CIPFA's Financial Management Code**. Officers reviewed the evidence of the Council's current arrangements compared to the Code's expectations and expressed their degree of confidence about how well these arrangements met the Code's expectations, using the RAG rating:

Red	Not compliant
Amber	Compliant but with scope for further improvement
Green	Compliant

- 5.34 The findings, reported to Audit Committee in April 2022, reported that the Council is self-assessed as achieving overall compliance with the expectations of the FM Code. The Council meets the minimum expectations for all 17 standards, with good compliance for 14 standards and demonstrable compliance, but with recognised scope for further improvement, for the three remaining standards.

- 5.35 2021/22 has again been an incredibly challenging year, initially due to the continued impact of the pandemic and then during the last quarter, the events in Ukraine and the first signs of the inflationary pressures. The scale of the local financial impact on both expenditure and income expectations led to major variations from our original approved plans for 2021/22 and the actual profile of spending bears little comparison to what we would expect to see in a normal year. The Council, along with the rest of the public sector, has also continued to receive unprecedented level of additional funding support from Central Government to try to mitigate the financial impact of the pandemic. Despite the financial challenges arising from the continuing national and local conditions, increasing cost and demand pressures, inflation and supply chain issues, the Council has managed its resources for 2021/22 within the approved budget. This enabled the Council to improve its overall reserves position and further bolster its financial strength and resilience to place it in a robust position to continue to navigate the ongoing challenges.
- 5.36 Significantly, the current financial landscape and operating environment for the Council remain extremely challenging and uncertain. While the Council remains financially resilient from both the impact of Covid-19 and the range of local demand and spending pressures, the Council is currently predicting a cumulative budget gap of £24m to the end of 2026/27 (Council Budget Report February 2022). Along with most local authorities, the Council continues to deal with the challenges of uncertainty, financial pressures, service demands and concerns for our residents and local area. Coping with the aftermath of the pandemic has been exacerbated and made much more complex by the implications of the events in Ukraine and an unprecedented rise in energy prices. This will have a major financial impact on the Council's approved financial plans for 2022/23 and its forecast for future years.
- 5.37 A Budget Transformation Programme for 2023/24 – 2026/27, was agreed as part of the Council's overall budget package, with areas identified to be scoped and developed further during 2022/23. This will support the Council's future financial sustainability; help target resources and re-design plans to avoid a financial 'cliff edge' that would need drastic action over a short time frame.
- 5.38 Other measures to support a drive towards financial sustainability and shape our priority focus include: on-going budget reviews; implementation of outcome-based budgeting; better linking of business planning and budgeting to service outcomes; effective and creative management of service demand; review of major contractual arrangements; further implementation of the Commissioning Framework; exploring new commercial opportunities; a range of income generation initiatives and continuing to enhance our systems, processes and internal business transformation arrangements.
- 5.39 The Council's 'Getting to Know Your Business' programme for service managers continued to be embedded in 2021/22 and will be essential in assessing the new operating environment, financial challenges, and value for money of services. The ambition is that all service managers in the Council will have a comprehensive understanding of their business areas in terms of their benchmarked operational and financial performance, key demand and cost drivers, income levels, commercial opportunities, value for money and customer insight.

- 5.40 This programme, together with a comprehensive 'strategic-fit' review against our Southend 2050 ambition, administration priorities, economic recovery aspirations and delivering better outcomes and value for money for our local residents influenced the development of the investments, savings, income generation proposals and level of council tax agreed for 2022/23.
- 5.41 The Council continued to play a central role in the growth and recovery agenda developed with the **Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA)**. This was set out in the publication of its Growth & Recovery Prospectus that outlines the investment programmes and projects needed to deliver productive jobs, physical and digital connectivity, 'blue and green' infrastructure and new, affordable homes for residents and business. In October 2021, the governance arrangements to oversee the work of ASELA and its associated programmes was formalised with the establishment of a Joint Committee with other councils under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972. Southend-on-Sea City Council will continue to provide secretariate support and it is proposed that the Council further acts as the Accountable Body for the Joint Committee. As a means of scrutiny, the Council will continue to submit the minutes of the Joint Committee to the People and Resources Scrutiny Committee.
- 5.42 Following the announcement of the UK Community Renewal Fund in the Chancellor's Autumn statement, Southend-on-Sea City Council invited prospective projects to bid. Eligibility information as well as which types of projects would best strategically fit the needs and priorities locally was published on the Council's webpages. A media campaign also raised awareness. The Council used a proportion of the available capacity funding to engage consultants who supported the analysis of bids. The Council further recruited an Assessment Panel made up of local partners representing various groups in Southend who made a final decision on which bids would be formally shortlisted to government as part of the proposal for funding. Panel members included representatives from the Department of Work and Pensions, South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), and local charities and community groups. To maintain independence and transparency in the process, an internal 'firewall' was established within the Council. This meant that those bidding from within the Council were not involved or privy to the process of assessment and decision making.
- 5.43 Due to the timescales set by central government, a final shortlist of projects was agreed via Standing Order 46 in June 2021. Later in the year the Council were awarded funding for two projects.
- 5.44 The Council continued to be an active partner to the SELEP, with the Council represented by the Deputy Leader at the main (Strategic) Board and Accountability Board, and by the Portfolio Holder or Deputy Leader at the South Essex sub-board "Opportunity South Essex". The Council has secured further funding from SELEP for which it is accountable.
- 5.45 Following the establishment of Porters Place Southend-on-Sea LLP as the joint venture partnership to progress the Better Queensway regeneration project in April 2019, the joint venture secured hybrid planning consent in March 2021 and has subsequently submitted a reserved matters application for the first phase of development. Through the partnership £4.2m Get Building Fund was also secured to add to the £15m Housing Infrastructure Fund previously secured from Homes England. Swan Housing is working through a merger with Orbit Group which is

expected to complete in the autumn of 2022. Whilst this has the potential to be positive as the Council will have an even stronger partner, it does mean there are some delays to the scheme while the merger progresses.

- 5.46 The Council continued to act as the accountable body for a number of externally funded projects operating across Southend, South Essex and the wider South East. These include the South East Business Boost (SEBB) European Regional Development Fund programme (although funding for this has now come to an end), the Enterprise Advisor Network provision in Southend and the Construction Industry Training Board funded South Essex Construction Training Academy (SECTA).
- 5.47 New developments for Ipeco and Costa have been completed at the Airport Business Park and the Launchpad and Quad developments are progressing well with completion expected in July 2022. Several other interests are in various stages of planning and legal work. The Airport Business Park Management Company was activated following practical completion. Its primary role being the management of the common parts of the estate and management of the service charge.
- 5.48 The cross-party Shareholder Board, formed to oversee the governance of the Council's companies and joint ventures, chaired by the Leader and reporting to Cabinet, continued to meet. It received the accounts and business plans of South Essex Homes; Southend-on-Sea Forum Management Ltd (a zero-profit joint venture between the University of Essex, the Council and South Essex College set up to manage the property of The Forum), PSP Southend LLP, a joint venture company for property development, Southend Care and Porters Place Southend LLP, joint venture formed to regenerate the Queensway estate.
- 5.49 Following an LGA Remote Peer Support of how the Council and partners can more effectively support 18–25-year-olds in the city (in October 2020), the Council revised the governance arrangements for Southend Adult Community College (SACC). A shadow internal board was established at the start of 2021 and went live in April 2021 when the Governing Body held its last meeting. An external Advisory Board has been recruited and is now in place. The chair of the Advisory Board is an observer on the Council's internal governance group for the college and the Council's Director of Regeneration and Growth is an observer on the Board to provide link up and read across. The internal governance group meets monthly and has now been in place for a year and is well established and will undertake regular reviews to check its effectiveness.
- 5.50 A cross-Council working group to co-ordinate the Council's response to the impact of the UK's exit from the European Union was disbanded recognising that most impacts are long term and responses to business as usual. This arrangement mirrors the Essex Resilience Forum approach. However, the Microsoft Teams channel has been retained as a route to escalating any issues that may arise.
- 5.51 Mandatory e-learning for both data protection and cyber security was undertaken by staff, supplemented by alternative tailored training for those for who using an e-learning platform might not be appropriate. Recommendations from previous audits were progressed. Policies and internal processes have been updated, including the Acceptable Use Policy and Digital Information Security Policy.

- 5.52 The Council's approach to cyber security is aligned to best practices and frameworks and audited. Improvements in maturity are regularly self-assessed. The Council's approach to information management, data protection and cyber security was also reviewed by the NHS Data Security Protection Toolkit enabling assessment against Department of Health information governance policies and standards. For 2020/21 the Council was independently assessed with an increase in maturity across all areas and as providing 'substantial assurance' in meeting 'standards met' compliance.
- 5.53 The Council is due an **LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC)** (the last one was in 2015) which was postponed in 2020 because of Covid and the need for it to take place 'on-site'. In anticipation of a full CPC the Council undertook a remote 'Corporate Health Check' in April 2021, welcoming a team of peers to assess the overall health of the organisation and helping to shape the Council's approach to recovery. The Health Check focussed on the Council's priorities; community engagement; systems and processes; investment in staff and councillors; digital capacity and financial planning. The feedback highlights a range of positive findings, including, the Council's response to the pandemic, the way the Council is progressing its ambitions and the soundness of the Council's finances. The report makes seven recommendations, covering: agreeing fewer priorities and focus; the need for a simpler narrative; building relationships with communities; the need for greater discipline and rigour and progressing councillor training & induction.
- 5.54 Preparations for a subsequent LGA Corporate Peer Challenge due to take place in November 2021 were made, however the Council respectfully asked for this to be postponed due to the tragic murder of the local MP Sir David Amess. A new LGA Corporate Peer Challenge is planned for October 2022.
- 5.55 Between 23 and 24 March 2022 OFSTED visited children's services. As part of the visit, the OFSTED inspectors looked at case files, met with the practitioners who held those cases as well as meeting with members of the Children in Care Council, a foster carer, managers, head and deputy head of the virtual school and colleagues from health. The outcome letter published by OFSTED recognised positive changes to the service but says more needs to be done.
- 5.56 Improvements outlined in the letter include:
- stronger leadership, including streamlined processes, better case management and increased investment in staff,
  - despite limited specialist resources, Ofsted noted there is some good work in the children with disabilities service,
  - the council was praised for its response to care for a greater number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children,
  - the Children in Care Council is an inclusive and enthusiastic group of children who are confident that leaders listen to their views.

5.57 Further work needs to be done on:

- the challenges around finding suitable long-term homes and while there are action plans in place, the changes need to happen quicker,
- there needs to be improved management, paperwork and priority given to direct work with children,
- the matching and long-term placement of children also needs to be improved and too many live too far away from Southend,
- there needs to be improved consistency for health provision and regular dental checks for children in care.

5.58 As an area, as before, progress will be reported in this and other aspects of the provision through our governance boards and to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

5.59 At the initial independent OFSTED/CQC formal area SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) inspection in October 2018, the area was required to submit a Written Statement of Action (WSOA), which was approved by regulators in May 2019. Each area required to produce a WSoA is subject to a revisit by OFSTED/CQC to determine progress against each of the aspects identified as significant weaknesses. Southend Area SEND received an on-site, blended revisit, between 7 and 9 May 2021. The visit included scrutiny of all documentation supplied, interviews with relevant stakeholders, including pupils and parents, and a parental survey.

5.60 The area received the final outcome letter for the revisit, on 22 June, identifying that of the four aspects of weakness, the Council had made sufficient progress against three of them - the Local Offer; the quality of Education Health and Care Plans and the quality of education provision received by learners with SEND. In the fourth aspect, Leadership and Joint Commissioning, whilst regulators had noted more recent progress, they considered that this was yet to fully impact upon children and families and determined that sufficient progress had not been made in this aspect.

5.61 OFSTED/CQC will play no further part in monitoring the original WSoA, but the Department of Education will support progress in the remaining aspect. As an area, as before, progress will be reported in this and other aspects of SEND provision through our governance boards and to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

5.62 Progress on actions to enhance governance arrangements arising from the 2020/21 Annual Governance Statement were reported to Audit Committee during the year, with progress on relevant outcomes against the action.

## **6. Internal Audit**

- 6.1 The annual risk-based Audit Plan was prepared in consultation with Directors, the Deputy Chief Executive, and the Chief Executive. It was developed by the Head of Internal Audit and approved by the Audit Committee. Terms of Reference and reports for specific audits are discussed with relevant Directors, Deputy Chief Executive, or the Chief Executive before being finalised, with the recommended actions required to mitigate risks summarised in an action plan.
- 6.2 Internal Audit revisits action plans where the original report's opinion was either Partial or Minimal assurance. These actions are retested, and the result of this work is reported to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Audit Committee as part of the Quarterly Performance Report.
- 6.3 Draft Head of Internal Audit Opinion for the year ended 31 March 2022**
- 6.4 Governance comprises the arrangements put in place to ensure that the intended outcomes for stakeholders are defined and achieved. Such arrangements can take many forms and still be effective. Assurance is then required that these processes are fit for purpose and being applied throughout the organisation.
- 6.5 During 2021/22 the Council continued to be impacted by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The Council's response held up well through the year, coordinating a wide range of resources from a range of diverse sources to provide the support, response, and management of the community to meet the requirements of the City as it went through, and then emerged from, different periods of lockdown during the year. Significant changes remained in place over the operations of the Council, including most staff working remotely and many staff being redeployed from their usual duties to support the response to the pandemic. This has enabled the Council to deliver what was required in response to the pandemic, including the significant contribution made by the Public Health team through their work delivering the Local Outbreak Management Plan. The governance arrangements in respect of this work were found to be operating effectively.
- 6.6 The Council continued to build on the work that had been undertaken to create the shared ambition for the borough, now City, and desired outcomes for its residents, visitors, students, and other stakeholders. Updates have been made to refresh the outcomes being sought and their delivery arrangements to ensure that these remain appropriate given the changed context and circumstances being faced. This has included work to continue to transform the culture, the way that the Council operates, so that the Council shifts to a culture, a focus, a structure, and ways of working that are most effective and appropriate to deliver the required outcomes in the changed circumstances. Work is now underway on producing a new Corporate Plan that aims to provide the necessary focus on the priorities for the Council, so that the Council's resources can be applied to the delivery of those priorities.
- 6.7 Further challenges have arisen in respect of the wider economic situation, with the impact of inflation, including the cost of energy, creating additional financial pressures for the Council, residents, the supply chain, and other stakeholders. Management needs to continue to monitor the actual and potential impact of these pressures, the progress against delivery of the forthcoming Corporate Plan, and be ready to adjust, if necessary, as the situation continues to change and the understanding of the impact on future needs and priorities becomes clearer.

- 6.8 There remains much to do, and the Council is preparing to deliver and meet these multiple challenges. As a result, there continues to be changes made to way the Council is operating. The governance arrangements and ways of working are currently being reviewed, and therefore there is a need for changes arising to have the opportunity to be established and embedded before assurance can be provided that they are working effectively as intended. Management continues to need to work in the context of continuous change in the external environment, which makes it difficult to achieve a period of stability that would assist with implementing and embedding revised arrangements.
- 6.9 With regards to the assurance provided by audit work undertaken in these areas, the results of the work indicate that the design of the Council's risk management can be provided with satisfactory assurance, although the Risk Management Policy Statement and Strategy is due to be reviewed and refreshed, but partial assurance in respect of operation, as there is a need for further embedding of the arrangements within the services so that there is increased understanding of the need to capture the conversations about risk that are happening, to provide increased visibility, transparency and accountability for decision making around the risks below those on the corporate risk register. The design and operation of internal control can be provided with satisfactory assurance, but issues have been highlighted in respect of the governance framework as operated for the year indicating that this requires improvement before it can be considered to be satisfactory overall, therefore partial assurance is provided for the year. Work to improve the governance framework and arrangements is being undertaken, as reflected in the Annual Governance Statement action plan, and will be reported to Members later in the year.
- 6.10 The basis for forming this opinion is an assessment of:
- the design and operation of the underpinning governance and assurance framework
  - the range of individual opinions arising from risk based and other audit assignments that have been reported during the year, taking into account the relative significance of these areas
  - whether management properly implement actions arising from audit work completed, to mitigate identified control risks within reasonable timescales
  - observations from advisory and support work undertaken
  - changes to the Council's Ambition, management structure and use of technology
  - assurance from other providers including independent regulators and peer reviews
  - the quality and performance of the Internal Audit service and the extent of compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.
- 6.11 The Head of Internal Audit has not reviewed all risks and assurances relating to the Council's activities in coming to this opinion.

## 6.12 Compliance with Professional Standards, Head of Internal Audit Opinion

6.13 I can confirm that I have maintained an appropriate Quality and Improvement Programme (QAIP) during the year for the in-house team and work undertaken by contractors when being managed by the in-house team. As required by the Standards, this consisted of:

- on-going supervision and review of individual audit assignments completed by in-house staff or contractors working to in-house staff
- reporting on a limited set of performance targets to the Audit Committee (for all work done including that of external suppliers)
- reviewing the independent external assessment of compliance with the Standards which is required at least every five years and updating for the position for this year.

6.14 I have received assurance from external suppliers used that where they have undertaken work using their own audit approach, that are also compliant with the Standards.

## 7. Issues for the Annual Governance Statement

7.1 No issues have come to internal audit's attention this year, other than those already disclosed, that we believe need including in the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

## 8. External Inspections and assessments

8.1 Assurance over the control environment is also obtained from external inspections and assessments of service areas. External assessments for 2021/22 included:

- **LGA Health Check – April 2021** – as outlined above.
- **Local area SEND inspection** – May 2021, as outlined above.
- **Children's services focused visit** – March 2022, as outlined above
- **Public Health - Pandemic Response** – Cabinet Office visited the Council last summer to review how the Local Outbreak Management Plan will deliver suppression of the virus, is adequate for a coastal town / city and how the Council is working in partnership with key anchor institutions. The Council was highly commended for our preparedness.
- **Schools** - There were 10 full Ofsted school inspections (plus 1 monitoring visit) completed during the financial year 2021/22. The overall position at April 2022 therefore was:
  - Primary schools: 5 outstanding, 27 good, 2 requires improvement.
  - Secondary Schools: 5 outstanding, 5 good, 1 requires improvement, 1 inadequate.
  - Special schools: 1 outstanding, 3 good, 1 requires improvement.
  - Pupil Referral Unit/alternative provision: 1 good, 2 requires improvement.

This means that 89.6% of children were attending good or outstanding schools as of April 2022.

- **Adult Social care ratings:**
  - Nursing homes: 1 outstanding, 8 good, 3 requires improvement and 1 inadequate.
  - Residential homes: 3 outstanding, 56 good, 9 requires improvement, 2 inadequate.
    - Domiciliary care agencies: 4 outstanding; 33 good; 6 requires improvement; 3 inadequate.

## **9. Conclusion**

9.1 We have been advised on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by the Audit Committee and that the arrangements are regarded as requiring further improvement before being regarded as fully fit for purpose. Work is underway to make the necessary improvements.

9.2 Actions to be specifically addressed are outlined below.

## Further actions to strengthen the Council's governance arrangements for 2021/22

No	Area	Action	Date of Implementation	Responsible Officer
1.	Governance Framework	To complete the review currently being undertaken to address the need to update and strengthen the governance arrangements and processes that underpin how the Council works. To engage with the LGA through the planned Corporate Peer Challenge and gain their insight into the planned work and how best to embed.		Interim Executive Director - Strategy, Change and Governance - Stephen Meah-Sims
2.	Risk Management	To complete the review currently being undertaken of the Risk Management Policy Statement and Strategy and then to update and embed the risk management arrangements that support the delivery of the Council's ambition and outcomes.		Head of Internal Audit and Counter Fraud - Andrew Barnes
3.	Contract Management	To enhance the Council's approach to contract management through development of a bespoke contract and relationship management system, providing updates and reminders, the returns of quarterly KPI data and a data repository and audit tool for contract management of our most strategic contracts. Corporate roll out of a Contract Management Manual for commissioners to use alongside a peer group, overseen by Corporate Procurement and the provision of other tools and templates for contract managers. Building capacity of contract managers to deliver the Social Value Policy, enabling them to achieve social value from our contracts.		Head of Procurement – Lee White
4.	Project Management	To embed a new Programme Management Officer (PMO) operating model which will provide greater understanding of the capabilities required for strategy materialisation and project success. This will be achieved through greater coordination across priority areas including the governance and assurances processes required.		Interim Executive Director - Strategy, Change and Governance - Stephen Meah-Sims

### **Significant Governance Issues**

We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

**ANDY LEWIS**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**  
DATE:

**CLLR STEPHEN GEORGE**  
**LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**  
DATE:

## SBC Corporate Governance Actions – 2020/21 – Progress

No	Governance Issue	Action	Responsible Officer	Comment on Progress
1.	Review the Council's priorities in the context of the ongoing impact of Covid.	Agree fewer priorities to provide clearer focus for the council, including a refresh of Southend 2050 Ambition, Outcomes and Road Map milestones.	Chief Executive	<p>Southend 2050 was reviewed and refreshed to enable the Council to focus on the next 12 months. The refresh:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restructured the governance of Southend 2050 to enable a delivery focus to support recovery, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Covid-19 Gold and Silver Groups to transition into the Southend 2050 themes and Outcome Delivery Teams.</li> <li>o Alignment of Corporate Management Team Sponsors for each of the six themes.</li> <li>o Alignment of Outcome Delivery Leads for the Outcomes.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Formalised Future Ways of Working as the sixth Southend 2050 theme;</li> <li>• Prioritised outcomes within each of the themes; and</li> <li>• Focused the prioritised roadmap milestones on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Delivery;</li> <li>o Response to the Covid-19 pandemic;</li> <li>o Economic recovery – from both Covid-19 impacts and any Brexit impacts; and</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

				o Sustainability – financial, environmental and our transformation as an organisation.
2	Progress the next iteration of the Council's transformation programme – Future Ways of Working.	Review the Council's ways of working with a view to improving operational performance across the organisation. This will include undertaking a review of business support functions, progressing the digital strategy and re-engineering systems and processes to ensure a better customer experience.	Executive Director – Strategy, Change and Governance	<p>See paragraph 5.17 above.</p> <p>An all-staff engagement survey and team challenge were both completed in 2021/22, giving employees the opportunity to have their say on what the future of work will look like at the council. Teams and individuals were asked to reflect on working practices developed during the pandemic.</p> <p>A new staff intranet has been developed, ready to be launched in May 2022. It includes a dedicated area for councillors.</p> <p>We have successfully completed laptop and desktop replacement programmes and rolled out softphones to enable employees to make calls from their computer. As well as providing council officers with access to the latest technology, to help people collaborate and communicate with others and work more efficiently and safely, we have also provided self-guided and mentor-based training on using the technology. The movement of applications to the cloud is ongoing, increasing access to reliable, optimised technology, as well as increasing productivity.</p>

				<p>The council continues to invest in the development of our workforce. We have successfully developed a councillor training programme with a working group of councillors. A Transformational Leadership Development Programme has also been launched to provide senior leaders with group training and individual coaching.</p>
3	<p>Undertake a review of councillor decision making.</p>	<p>Review the current Constitution with a view to improving the effectiveness of the Council's decision-making processes, including streamlining the content and making it easier to follow.</p>	<p>Executive Director, Strategy, Change and Governance</p>	<p>A review of the Council's Constitution commenced in March 2021. Bevan Brittan were commissioned to carry out a review and reflect upon where the Constitution may be improved to better reflect how the Council wishes to operate. Following this initial review, the General Purposes Committee agreed to provide all members with the opportunity to engage in conversations supported by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) about which aspects of the Constitution may be changed. The CfGS met with each party group to discuss the working practices of the Constitution, learning and best practice from elsewhere, prior to facilitating cross party workshops in order to establish consensus on changes. The work is ongoing and the CfGS is due to report their findings and recommendations for next steps.</p>

				Changes are expected to include a rewrite of the Constitution, with the aim of using plain English, reordering, and removing duplication and making the document more accessible. Other changes may include opportunities to enhance timely decision making.
4	Financial Management Code Self-Assessment action plan	To implement the Financial Management Code Self-Assessment action plan, progressing the four areas identified, which while currently compliant, need to be strengthened/improved.	Executive Director, Finance & Resources	A six-monthly progress update was noted by Audit Committee at its meetings in October 2021 and April 2022. It noted that good progress was being made against the four areas that had been identified as needing to be strengthened/improved. The annual review against the expectations of the Code has been undertaken in 2022 and the results and updated action plan to deliver further improvements was endorsed by Audit Committee at its meeting in April 2022.