

CANNOCK CHASE DISTRICT COUNCIL

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT FOR 2021-22

1. Scope of Responsibility

- 1.1 Cannock Chase District Council (the 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 make arrangements 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 putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.
- 1.3 The Council has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*. This statement explains how the Council has complied with the code and also meets the requirements of Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, regulation 6(1)(b), which require all relevant authorities to prepare an annual governance statement.

2. The Purpose of the Governance Framework

- 2.1 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values by which the authority is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads its communities. It enables the authority 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 ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood and potential impact of those risks being 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 Governance Statement.

3. The Governance Framework

3.1 The Council has adopted a local Code of Governance, which can be found on the Council's website. The Code is comprised of 6 key principles:

1. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.
2. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.
3. Defining the vision and outcomes for the local area and determining the actions necessary to achieve the intended outcomes.
4. Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.
5. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.
6. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.

3.2 A key element of the Council's governance arrangements concerns safeguarding. Cannock Chase District Council has both a moral and legal obligation to ensure a duty of care for children and vulnerable adults across its services. We are committed to ensuring that all children and vulnerable adults are protected and kept safe from harm whilst engaged in services organised and provided by the Council. We do this by:

- Having a Child & Adult Protection Policy and procedure in place endorsed by the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board and Staffordshire and Stoke Adult Safeguarding Partnership
- Having child & adult protection processes which give clear, step-by-step guidance if abuse is identified
- Safeguarding training programme in place for staff and members
- Carrying out the appropriate level of DBS checks on staff and volunteers
- Working closely with Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board & Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Adult Safeguarding Partnership

4. Review of effectiveness

- 4.1 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 led by the Head of Governance & Corporate Services who has responsibility for the development and maintenance of the Code of Governance. The review is informed by the work of Members, the senior officers within the Council and also by comments made by the External Auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates. The process that has been applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework is set out below.
- 4.2 **The Authority** - the Head of Governance and the Monitoring Officer, on behalf of the Council, undertakes reviews of the Council's governance arrangements on an ongoing basis. Work to support this includes a periodic self-assessment review against the Code of Governance, reviews of the Constitution, Financial Regulations, the Scheme of Delegation and policies, processes and practices throughout the year. No new issues have been identified in 2021-22.
- 4.3 **The Executive** - the Cabinet monitors the effectiveness of the governance framework through the consideration of regular performance and financial management reports. Individual Cabinet members receive regular feedback from senior officers on the delivery of services and the achievement of objectives and targets. Issues of strategic and corporate importance are referred to the Cabinet. There is also a formal Shadow Cabinet in place, which provides an opportunity to challenge decisions and how they are made.
- 4.4 **Overview and Scrutiny committees** - the Council had 3 Scrutiny Committees during 2021-22, which were aligned to the Council's priorities. The Scrutiny Committees review decisions made by Cabinet and areas of concern. They can "call-in" a decision that has been made by the Cabinet when they consider the decision is not in accordance with the Council's Constitution. The Scrutiny Committees:
- (i) determine their own work programme at the beginning of each year and this includes the provision of updates, briefings and reviews of services/activities; and
 - (ii) consider regular performance management information from senior management.
- 4.5 **The Audit & Governance Committee** - is responsible for overseeing the Council's governance arrangements. The Committee monitors the effectiveness of risk management, reviews corporate governance issues, the work of Internal Audit and the anti-fraud & corruption arrangements throughout the year. The Audit & Governance Committee receives quarterly reports on:
- the work of internal audit in reviewing the systems and processes to ensure that they are adequate; and

- updates on the management of the Council's strategic risks. A strategic risk register is in place, which identifies and evaluates the risks faced by the Council in delivering its objectives. Work is ongoing to review and address these risks and update the risk register accordingly

4.6 **The Standards Committee** - is responsible for the ethical framework of the Council. The Committee works closely with the Monitoring Officer in dealing with complaints about Members conduct and promoting high standards of conduct.

4.7 **Internal Audit** – is responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements, including the system of internal control, and reporting on its adequacy. Internal Audit is a key source of assurance for the Annual Governance Statement and operates in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

Internal Audit reviews the internal control system following an audit plan based on an assessment of the potential risks for the various systems and procedures.

The work on the Audit Plan for 2021-22 has been used to provide an independent view on the adequacy of the governance framework. In the annual report to the Audit & Governance Committee, the Chief Internal Auditor has independently assessed the Council's internal control environment and given a "**partial assurance**" opinion that the Council's governance arrangements were operating adequately and there were no instances where any breakdown of control resulted in a material discrepancy. No significant governance issues have been identified for inclusion in the Annual Governance Statement. Where deficiencies in internal control were identified during reviews, assurance was provided that these had been or would be resolved in an appropriate manner. Such cases will continue to be followed-up as part of the routine operation of the Internal Audit function.

4.8 **Risk Management** - during 2021-22 the Audit & Governance Committee received regular progress reports regarding the management of strategic risks. As of April 2022, there are currently 4 red risks for inclusion as significant governance issues:

- Poor budget planning, over commitment of financial resources or inappropriate use of reserves leading to a financial shortfall or overspends that undermine the Council's ability to deliver services, corporate priorities or leading to external intervention
- Adverse Global economic conditions lead to a serious impact on the performance of the District's economy
- Changes in the operational costs/income due to economic factors which impact on the sustainability key Contractors to deliver the required services
- The Council doesn't have sufficient officer capacity or financial resources to sustain delivery of essential services and key projects.

4.9 **Assurance from the Statutory Officers** - assurances have been sought, through discussions with the Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive), the Monitoring Officer (Head of Law & Administration) and the s151 Officer (Head of Finance) with regard to their responsibilities for governance.

- The Head of Paid Service has overall responsibility for the organisation, appointment and management of staff.
- The Chief Financial Officer (s151 Officer) has overall responsibility for the financial management of the Council.

Throughout the year the s151 Officer ensures that the financial position of the Council is monitored, that consideration is given to financial implications when taking decisions and with the support of internal audit that financial processes are complied with.

- The Monitoring Officer has overall responsibility for:
 - reporting on matters he/she believes are, or are likely to be, illegal or amount to maladministration;
 - matters relating to the conduct of Members and officers; and
 - the operation of the Council's constitution.

The Statutory Officers have identified the following as significant governance issues:

- Ongoing financial pressures;
- Capacity issues in sustaining delivery of essential services and key projects;
- Further sharing of services with Stafford Borough Council;
- Implementation of the new finance system.

4.10 **External Audit / Other Review Agencies** - during the year the Council received the following key reports:

- (i) Audit Findings (dated April 2022 and reported to Audit & Governance Committee 25 April 2022).

The report offered an unqualified opinion on the Council's financial statements. No significant concerns were identified.

4.11 **Leadership Team** - in addition to the Statutory Officers assurances, the members of Leadership Team have been consulted on the draft annual governance statement and the significant governance issues that should be included within it.

5. Opinion on the Governance Framework

5.1 The review of the effectiveness of the governance framework show that the arrangements continue to be fit for purpose and **reasonable assurance** can be given that the framework is operating adequately in practice.

5.2 No review can provide absolute assurance; this statement is intended to provide reasonable assurance that there is an ongoing process for reviewing the governance framework and it's operation in practice.

5.3 Whilst the governance framework is considered to be adequate a number of issues have been identified that need to be addressed to further enhance the Council's governance arrangements. These are outlined in section 6 together with the actions to be taken.

5.4 The Audit & Governance Committee will have responsibility for ensuring the delivery of the actions needed to improve the Council's governance framework.

6. Significant Governance Issues

6.1 The Council's key governance issues are outlined in the action plan below.

ISSUE & ACTION	OFFICER RESPONSIBLE	TARGET DATE
<p>Financial Stability</p> <p>The Council incurred both additional expenditure and a material loss of income from fees and charges etc. as a result of the pandemic, offset by grant funding. The Council's finances began to stabilise which enabled a budget to be set in February 2022, but the newly arising challenges of inflation and interest rates will place a burden on this year's budget and the medium term outlook. These factors will have an impact on expenditure, as direct costs (including pay) will rise, as well as on residents and businesses, which will place greater demands on Council services and potentially reduce income. Over the medium term, there remains significant uncertainty regarding the direction of Government policy for local government finance.</p> <p>This has been/ will be addressed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval of the 2022-23 budget; • Reinforcement of good financial management at senior officer level; 	<p>s151 Officer</p> <p>Leadership Team</p>	<p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p>

ISSUE & ACTION	OFFICER RESPONSIBLE	TARGET DATE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring reserves over the medium term and setting a Medium Term Financial Strategy that does not reduce unallocated reserves; • Implementing a savings plan to help bridge the budget gap for 2023-24; • Refreshing the Medium Term Financial Strategy. 	<p>s151 Officer</p> <p>s151 Officer</p> <p>s151 Officer</p>	<p>January 2023</p> <p>October 2022</p> <p>January 2023</p>
<p>The Economy of the District</p> <p>There is a risk that adverse global economic conditions may lead to a serious impact on the performance of the District's economy. To mitigate against this risk, key actions to be progressed during 2022-23 will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to review the Council's Economic Prosperity Strategy; and • for the Council to work with partners to progress key projects including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Levelling Up Fund project for Cannock town centre ➤ McArthurGlen Designer Outlet- phase 2 ➤ Re-development of the former Rugeley power Station ➤ Submit Investment Plan for the Council's allocation from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund • Progress the review of the Local Plan, with the Council proceeding with a public consultation on the next stage of the Plan (regulation 18 / pre-submission version) 	<p>Head of Economic Prosperity</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

ISSUE & ACTION	OFFICER RESPONSIBLE	TARGET DATE
<p>The Council's Key Contractors</p> <p>There is a risk that changes in the operational costs/income due to economic factors will impact on the sustainability of the Council's key Contractors to deliver the required services. This is a particular concern for the Council's 2 key contracts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the leisure contractor IHL, has already been adversely affected by the successive lockdowns and the leisure sector has not fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels. waste contracts - a new dry mixed recycling contract has been procured which has led to a switch to dual stream recycling collection to avoid a significant increase in disposal costs. The Council has also negotiated a two-year extension to March 2025 with its incumbent supplier, Biffa Municipal Plc, to allow for the full publication of the Government's Resources and Waste Strategy. 	<p>Head of Environment & Healthy Lifestyles</p>	
<p>Key actions for 2022-23 include:</p> <p>Leisure:</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to monitor and work with IHL in regard to Covid recovery, service income and expenditure and impacts of cost of living on memberships/service users. Work with IHL to set the management fee for 2023/24 subject to Covid recovery. 	<p>Head of Environment & Healthy Lifestyles</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Waste:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to monitor and review the input/output of the waste and recycling collections and disposal contracts. Update waste and recycling specifications in accordance with new national resource and waste strategy and local requirements in preparation for market testing prior to 2025. 	<p>Head of Environment & Healthy Lifestyles</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

ISSUE & ACTION	OFFICER RESPONSIBLE	TARGET DATE
<p>Officer Capacity</p> <p>Resources continue to be stretched between the delivery of essential services, key projects and the introduction of new responsibilities upon the Council. Priorities have been kept under review during 2021-22 and additional resources brought in where required. 3 senior officers left/retired during 2021/22. One of these positions has been appointed to and another is being covered on an interim basis pending a recruitment process. The Chief Executive is being covered through a sharing arrangement with Stafford Borough Council pending consideration of wider sharing of services, which has the potential to offer increased capacity and resilience. A review of priorities has been undertaken and a new Corporate Plan agreed for 2022-26.</p> <p>Key actions for 2022-23 include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment of the s151 Officer; • Development of delivery plans to support the corporate plan; and • Ongoing monitoring. 	<p>Chief Executive</p> <p>Leadership Team</p> <p>Leadership Team</p>	<p>July 2022</p> <p>August 2022</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Shared Services</p> <p>The Council has been sharing a number of services with Stafford Borough Council since April 2011. The Chief Executive is currently being shared pending the development of a business case to assess the potential for the further sharing of services between the two Councils.</p> <p>The first stage of the business case has been completed and both Councils have approved proceeding to developing the 2nd stage of the business case.</p> <p>The key action is to complete the 2nd stage of the business case for consideration by both Councils</p>	<p>Chief Executive</p>	<p>November 2022</p>

ISSUE & ACTION	OFFICER RESPONSIBLE	TARGET DATE
<p>Cyber Security</p> <p>There is an ongoing risk of cyber attacks. Arrangements have been enhanced during 2021/22 and additional work is planned during 2022/23 including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to the network to be limited to corporate devices only 	Head of Technology	August 2022
<p>New Finance System</p> <p>The new Finance system went live on 1 April 2021. The core external elements of the system in terms of payments to creditors and income collection were up and running from day one. However, teething troubles have been experienced; some of these have been addressed and others are ongoing. The Finance Team are currently completing the first closure of the accounts on the new system. The following actions have been undertaken/are planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing project management • Testing and checking that the system is operating as expected • User training. • Post implementation review 	Head of Finance	Ongoing
<p>Employees' Code of Conduct</p> <p>The review of the Employees' Code of Conduct has been completed but approval by Council was deferred due to other priorities during the pandemic. It was intended to complete this during 2021/22 but has been deferred due to other changes being made to working arrangements which will have an impact on the Code. This primarily relates to the development of a hybrid working model which is being trialled during 2022/23. The Code of Conduct will be revised in 2023 once the hybrid working trial has been concluded and reviewed.</p>	Head of Human Resources, Head of Law & Administration and Head of Governance	2023/24

ISSUE & ACTION	OFFICER RESPONSIBLE	TARGET DATE
<p>Information Governance</p> <p>The draft Information Governance Framework needs to be finalised and approved by Leadership Team.</p>	<p>Head of Governance & Corporate Services</p>	<p>December 2022</p>
<p>Contracts Register</p> <p>Whilst some progress has been made in the re-letting of major contracts, departmental contracts registers and procurement plans to support the timely planning for the procurement of contracts still needs to be completed.</p>	<p>Head of Governance & Corporate Services and Leadership Team</p>	<p>To be in place for April 2023</p>
<p>Effective management of Corporate Assets and compliance)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure robust systems in place to secure compliance across full range of building related risks; • Review condition surveys for Council owned assets and identify a phased plan for maintenance / investment (linked to development of Asset Strategy / Plan) • Development of a new Asset Management Strategy / Plan. A new Asset Strategy has been produced and was approved by Cabinet in June 2022. Cabinet have agreed that the Council will undertake a full review of all Council owned land and property (General fund not HRA). 	<p>Head of Economic Prosperity and Corporate Assets Manager</p>	<p>Asset Management Group to be set up by September 2022</p> <p>Programme of Asset Reviews to commence Q2 / 3</p>
<p>Resettlement - Refugee & Asylum Seekers</p> <p>Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (SVPR), Afghan Resettlement and Assistance Programme (ARAP), Homes For Ukraine, Asylum Dispersal. The Council has new duties from Central Government under schemes for the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. New schemes in 2022 are Homes For Ukraine and Asylum Dispersal.</p> <p>Working in partnership with Staffordshire County Council and other Districts & Boroughs, a County wide approach has or is in process of being formulated for each scheme:</p>		

ISSUE & ACTION	OFFICER RESPONSIBLE	TARGET DATE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An improved co-ordinated approach to County-wide resettlement is being proposed and developed which will require input and resourcing. 	Leadership Team	July/Aug 2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of and development of a more County-wide co-ordinated approach to provision of future accommodation requirements within public sector housing and private rental sector. 	Head of Housing and Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles	Ongoing

Signed:

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Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee

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Date

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Leader of the Council

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Date

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Chief Executive
on behalf of Cannock Chase District Council

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Date