



ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2016/17

Introduction

East Hertfordshire District Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and relevant standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, 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 a regard of value for money.

The Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitation the effective exercise of its functions, including arrangements for the management of risk.

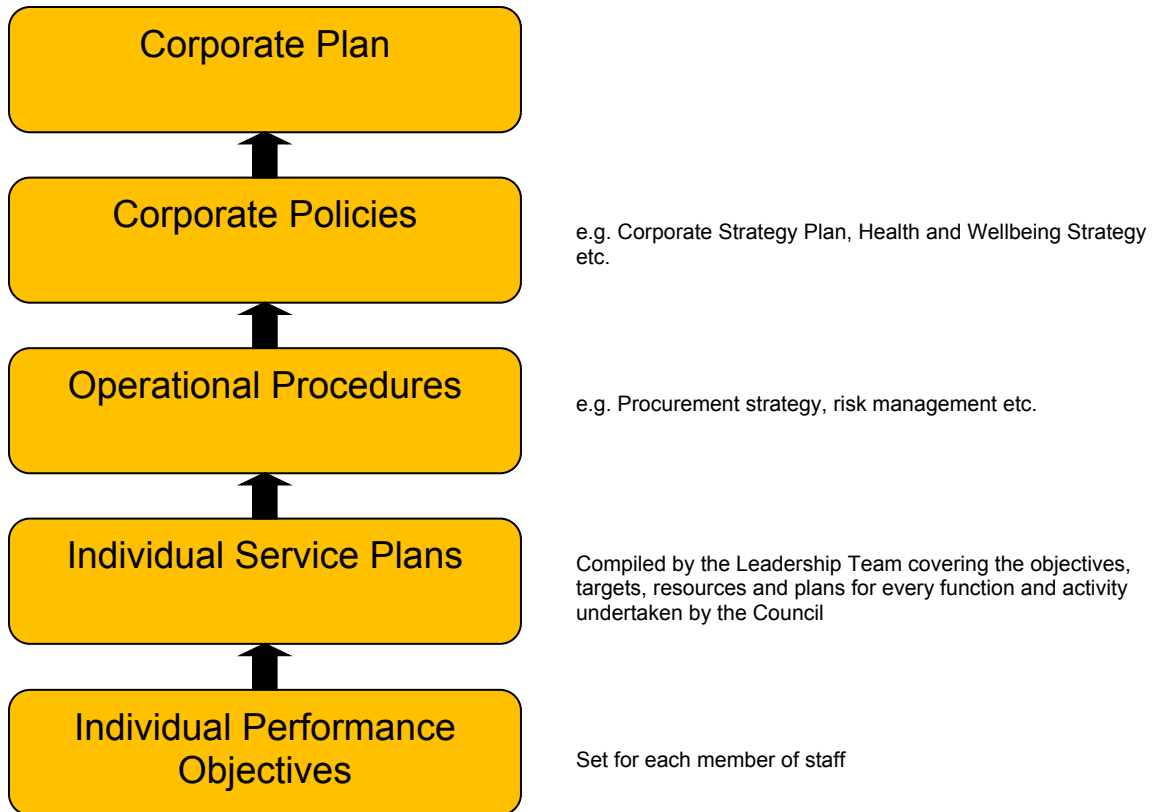
The Council's financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government 2010.

The Annual Governance Statement has been prepared and published in accordance with the Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (CIPFA/Solace, 2016) ('the Framework'). This fulfils the statutory requirement that Local authorities review their governance arrangements at least once a year. The Framework requires local authorities to be responsible for ensuring that:

- their business is conducted in accordance with all relevant laws and regulations;
- public money is safeguarded and property accounted for;
- there is clear accountability for the use of those resources in order to achieve desired outcomes for service users and communities.

The Framework also expects that local authorities should implement appropriate arrangements for the governance of their affairs in a way that facilitates the effective exercise of functions and ensure that the responsibilities set out above are met.

The following diagram shows how the Council's plans and strategies link together.



Meeting the CIPFA/SoLACE Framework Requirements

The Council has approved and adopted:

- a Code of Corporate Governance;
- the requirements of the CIPFA/SoLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016;
- a number of specific strategies and processes for strengthening corporate governance

The following sets out how the Council has complied with the seven principles set out in the CIPFA/SoLACE Framework during 2016/17.

Principal A Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

The Council has a Code of Conduct for elected Members and a Code of Corporate Governance which provides guidance for officers and Members on expected standards of behaviours to ensure integrity. The Council has three priorities which are:

Priority	Outcomes we want to see
Improve the health and wellbeing of our communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents living active and healthy lives • Support for our vulnerable families and individuals • Communities engaged in local issues
Enhance the quality of people's lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attractive places • Future development best meets the need of the district and its residents
Enable a flourishing local economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support our businesses and the local economy • Vibrant town centres • Working with others, to have achieved the right infrastructure for our businesses and communities

To support these priorities members and officers receive training in Code of Conduct and behaviour issues. The Standards Committee and Monitoring Officer keep Codes of Conduct up to date and investigate any suspected breaches.

All officers and Members sign up to the Council's Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy. In addition, the Performance, Audit and Governance Committee receive an annual report setting out the arrangements in place and how these have been applied in practice during the year. The Whistleblowing policy places emphasis on the agreed ethical values of Members and employees, providing protection for individuals to raise concerns in confidence about suspect behaviour and ensuring that any concerns raised are properly investigated.

All Council decisions have to consider legal implications which are recorded on the Council's website. Senior officers and other key post holders receive support from Legal Services in this regard and if specialist legal advice is required then the Council will engage external advisors. The Section 151 and Monitoring Officers have specific responsibility for ensuring legality, for investigating any suspected instances of failure to comply with legal requirements, and for reporting any such instances to members.

Principal B Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

All meetings are open to the public and all agenda papers, reports and decisions made by the Council are published on the Council's website together with details of forthcoming consultation exercises, surveys and, public meetings, except those determined as exempt from publication. The Council's constitution sets out how it engages with stakeholders and partners through a combination of joint working arrangements, partnership boards and representation on the governing bodies of external organisations including local NHS bodies, neighbourhood forums, local business and other local authorities.

In addition to local associations, The Council also works closely with town and parish councils to ensure comprehensive involvement in all its decisions.

The Council periodically publishes a newsletter – Network eNewsletter. This is a free publication and is also available online and the Council utilises various online communication channels including Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube. More specific e-bulletins are created for various communities of interest, such as Businesses and Families.

Principal C Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits
& Principal D Determining the interventions necessary to optimize the achievement of the intended outcomes

The Council's strategic vision for East Herts is set out in Our Corporate Strategy Plan. In pursuit of this vision, the Council develops various strategies to define specific outcomes for key service areas. Each Service also plans out how it will deliver the outcomes relevant to its area of work through business plans in accordance with the agreed annual budget. To remain focused on delivering sustainable social and environmental benefits, the Council has a Sustainable Community Strategy as well as a series of more specific strategies. These include the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, The Homeless and Homeless Prevention Strategy, Customer Services Strategy and Disclosure (Whistleblowing).

All service decisions are subject to rigorous scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which includes lead Members. Reviews of options and risk by officers and Members and key performance

indicators are in place for all services. These are reported quarterly and include reports to the Performance, Audit and Governance Committee for discussion and considered for intervention where target performance is not being achieved.

Budget proposals are developed by services, challenged and subject to scrutiny by the Leadership Team. The Council regularly engages with other authorities to learn and understand best practice as achieved in other places.

Principal E Developing the entity’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.

A key element of the Council’s service planning is to maximise the investment in staff through staff training, including the management development programme to empower and facilitate our senior managers and through them our workforce. All employees are enrolled on the Performance Development Review Scheme (PDRS) which assists employees in creating learning and development plans.

The Council works across a broad set of partnerships and collaborative arrangements, and uses commissioning and procurement processes to maximise capacity by delivering services in the most effective and efficient way.

Principal F Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.

The Risk Management Strategy sets out the Council’s approach to identifying and controlling risk. Risk registers are maintained at a corporate and individual service level with significant risks reported to the Leadership Team and to the Performance, Audit and Governance Committee.

Service outputs, outcomes, and achievements are monitored and reported quarterly.

The Council has an Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption strategy as well as Financial Regulations which set out expected processes and internal controls. The Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) team provide regular

reports on the effective operation of these controls together with an annual assessment of the overall control environment.

East Herts Council is developing a reputation for strong financial management. Internal quality assurance processes will be greatly enhanced by implementing the new finance system for financial planning and reporting.

Principal G Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit, to deliver effective accountability.

All Council decisions are published online together with supporting information to outline why such decisions were taken above comparable options. The Council follows the Government Communication Service guidance on providing clear and accurate information, and has developed its website to improve transparency and accessibility.

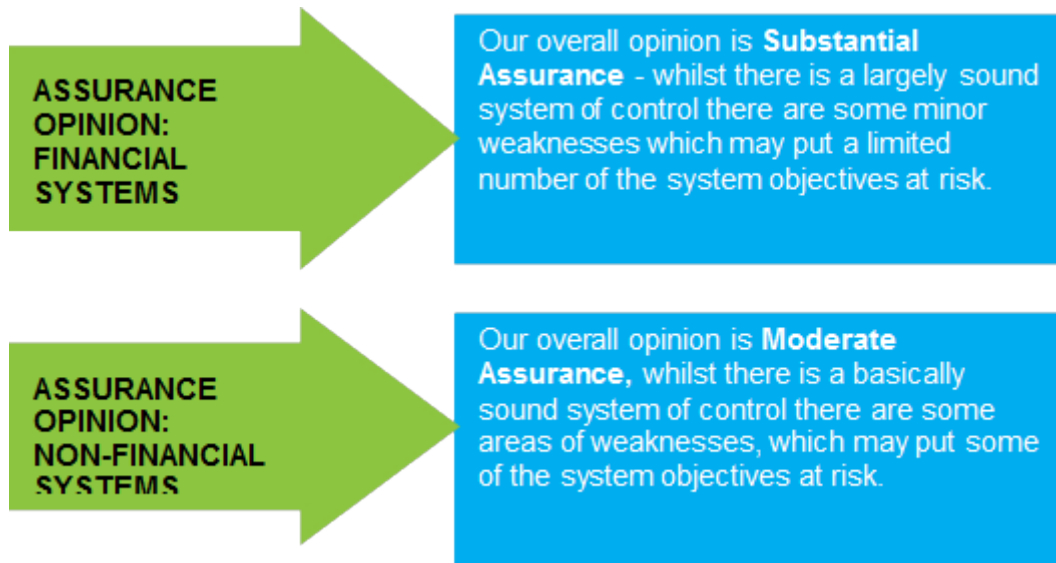
The Council reports its financial performance for scrutiny at the Performance, Audit and Governance Scrutiny Committee. This reporting incorporates services provided by all models of delivery including services shared with other authorities, partnerships and contracted out services, and reports performance and finance within the same document for ease of comparison.

Review of Effectiveness

Through reviews by external auditors, external agencies, the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) and internal review teams, the Council constantly seeks ways of securing continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised.

Internal Audit activity provided by SIAS is overseen by the Audit Committee and its responsibilities are defined by the Audit Committee through the Internal Audit Charter. The Charter is applicable to all clients of Hertfordshire's SIAS and provides them with an independent and objective opinion on the organisation's governance arrangements, encompassing internal control and risk management, by completing an annual risk-based audit plan.

Based on the internal audit work undertaken at the Council in 2016/17, SIAS have provided the following unqualified opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's control environment, broken down between financial and non-financial systems.



The Council's Head of Strategic Finance and Property has a statutory duty under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 to establish a clear framework for the proper administration of the authority's financial affairs, hence the S151 officer relies amongst other sources, upon the work of the internal audit in reviewing the operation of systems of internal control and financial management.

The Council's external auditor, Ernst & Young, provides assurance on the accuracy of the year-end Statement of Accounts and the overall adequacy of arrangements for securing and improving value for money. The most recent Audit Letter, issued in October 2016, identified no material errors in the accounts and gave an unqualified opinion. They also concluded that East Herts has put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of resources.

The Council's Finance Team have undertaken a review to confirm that the principles described above have been in place throughout the year. A Management Assurance Statement, signed by the Heads of Service have also been obtained to provide confirmation that Codes of Conduct, Financial Regulations, and other corporate governance processes, have been operating as intended throughout the year so far as they are aware.

Follow up of issues identified in 2015/16

During 2015/16, the following required enhancements to internal control arrangements were identified as a result of the review or arrangements and by the work of external and internal audit.

Issue	Actions needed to achieve milestone
Impact of Welfare Reform changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impending Legislation will have an adverse financial impact on a significant number of residents. Officers will monitor the impact of these changes both on residents and the business of the Council. • Provide residents more support for services across the council through staffing levels, budget management and the communication with residents. • Implement Council policies effectively
Development of a District Plan that is approved by the planning inspectorate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan to be agreed within required timeframe

The impending legislation changes to the Welfare Reform Act 2012 are still outstanding and the actions required will be still being needed as and when the legislation is passed.

The East Herts District Plan Pre-submission Consultation was published in November 2016.

A final consultation statement will be prepared once the Council is in a position to include reference to any representations made under regulation 20 at the end of the pre-submission consultation.

At the most recent District Planning Executive Panel it was recommended that a Duty to Co-operate Compliance Statement be agreed in support of the Pre-Submission District Plan and that the Head of Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, be authorised to agree any further amendments to the Duty to Co-operate Compliance Statement as required.

This item will continued to be monitored with the next meeting of the District Planning Executive Panel being in September 2017.

Conclusion

The Council is satisfied that appropriate governance arrangements are in place however, it remains committed to maintaining and where possible improving these arrangements, in particular by:

- addressing the issues identified by Internal Audit as requiring improvement
- embedding the use of covalent to measure performance