



Audit and Governance Committee

Date:	23 November 2022
Reference number:	N/A
Title:	2021/22 Revised Draft Annual Governance Statement
Cabinet Member(s):	N/A
Contact officer:	Nick Graham, Director of Legal & Democratic Services Glenn Watson, Principal Governance Officer
Ward(s) affected:	N/A
Recommendations:	Members are recommended to approve the Annual Governance Statement 2021/22.
Reason for decision:	It is a statutory requirement to adopt an Annual Governance Statement.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This report contains a revised draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2021/22. This is the second AGS for Buckinghamshire Council and relates to the second year of the Council's operation as a unitary authority. Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic was a key feature of the year. The Committee made some initial comments on the earlier draft at its meeting in September 2022.
- 1.2 The purpose of an AGS is to comment on the effectiveness of a council's governance arrangements for the year in question. Guidance issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) advises that an AGS should be high level, strategic, meaningful and brief. An AGS sits alongside a council's published Statement of Accounts for the same year. As such, and in order to meet that timeframe, the Committee needs to adopt an AGS for 2021/22 at this meeting.

- 1.3 An AGS should contain an Opinion as to the effectiveness of the governance arrangements, given by the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council. The draft AGS contains such an Opinion for 2021/22 based on the assurances contained within it:

“the Council’s governance arrangements in 2021/22 were sound and provide a robust and effective platform for achieving the Council’s priorities and challenges in 2022/23. It is our opinion that this has remained the case despite the very real challenges of providing services during a period of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.”

- 1.4 This revision incorporates the amendments suggested by members of the Committee at the last meeting and since. In particular, the Committee felt that OFSTED’s SEND inspection (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) should be reflected in the AGS and its associated action plan for 2022/23. This has been done.

2. Content of report

- 2.1 The draft AGS complies with CIPFA guidance in containing:

- a) An assessment of effectiveness
- b) An Opinion on that effectiveness
- c) An Action Plan for 2022/23, and comments on that for 2021/22
- d) A Conclusion

- 2.2 The draft reflects the conclusions reached in various annual, and other, reports received by Council, Cabinet and Committees which relate to aspects of governance during 2021/22. This has included:

- a) Chief Finance Officer’s Statutory Reports to Budget Setting Councils of 2021/22 and 2022/23
- b) Corporate Plan Refresh Report to Council in February 2022
- c) Buckinghamshire Council Annual Report to Annual Meeting in May 2022
- d) Annual Scrutiny Report 2021/22
- e) Audit & Governance Committee Annual Report in April 2022; and reports to the same Committee on internal audit and assurance process (March and May 2022)
- f) Community Boards Annual Report April 2022
- g) OFSTED re-inspection report (inspection period 6 December 2021 to 17 December 2021) and associated Cabinet, Select Committee reports
- h) OFSTED and Care Quality Commission SEND inspection letter

- 2.3 The Statement reflects the work of this Committee in overseeing governance, as outlined in the [September report](#) (paragraph 2.2).
- 2.4 The Statement now also includes the following as raised by members of the Committee:
- a) 'COVID-19' – standardised reference to this throughout
 - b) Risk Management Group – importance of the challenge made to directors on acceptable risk levels, page 2 and 15
 - c) The learning of lessons generally and also from other authorities' experience – page 2 and 16
 - d) Council – role in approval of 'budget and policy framework', page 6
 - e) Deputy Cabinet Members – role in support of Cabinet, page 6
 - f) Audit & Governance Committee – attendance by the Council's statutory Section 151 Officer (current Service Director of Finance), page 6
 - g) Select committees – more detail on their coverage and contribution, page 6
 - h) Community Boards and High Wycombe Town Committee - roles, page 7
 - i) Internal and External Audit – reflect their counter-fraud role, page 8
 - j) General Data Protection Regulation – GDPR policy to be referenced, page 10
 - k) Induction for members – include reference to ICT training on data security, page 10
 - l) Constitutional change – emphasise dual role of this Committee and the Standards & General Purposes Committee, page 10
 - m) Election petition – correct the previous reference by referring to "the Totteridge & Bowderdean Ward", page 11
 - n) Community Board experience – highlight that the 'rapid review' also included engagement with unparished communities, page 12
 - o) Community Board experience – reflect that a range of stakeholder views across parished and unparished areas were sought on their experience of community boards, page 12
 - p) SEND Inspection – clear articulation of the SEND Inspection, page 12-13; and inclusion of it in the Action Plan for 2022/23, page 18
 - q) Refugee support – include reference to Ukrainian refugees in addition to support for Afghan refugees, page 13
- 2.5 The activity of the Committee in overseeing governance during the current year will of course be reflected in the AGS for 2022/23, which will be drafted in early 2023, in a revised format, as agreed by the Committee earlier this year.

3. Other options considered

- 3.1 It is a legal requirement to produce an AGS and there is clear guidance from CIPFA as to the elements that an AGS should contain.

4. Legal and financial implications

- 4.1 The Council is required to produce an Annual Governance Statement under the Audit and Accounts Regulations 2015.

5. Corporate implications

- 5.1 The AGS reflects the effectiveness of the Council's governance during 2021/22 and sets out priority actions for improving governance in 2022/23.

6. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

- 6.1 N/A

7. Communication, engagement & further consultation

- 7.1 N/A.

8. Next steps and review

- 8.1 Approval of the AGS by this Committee fulfils the legal requirement for members to adopt the AGS ahead of the required signature by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.
- 8.2 Once finalised, the AGS would be made available as part of the Council's Statement of Accounts. It would also be available on the Council's website. Members had also asked how the AGS could be made available to those who did not have access to, or preferred not to use, the Council's website. Copies will be made available in hard copy at each of the Council's offices and libraries.

9. Background papers

- 9.1 CIPFA's 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework' (2016 Edition).

