



Exeter City Council

Annual Governance Statement

2019-20

Scope of Responsibility

Exeter 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 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.

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, including arrangements for the management of risk.

The Council has approved and adopted a Code of Corporate Governance, which is consistent with the principles of Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (CIPFA/Solace 2016). This statement explains how Exeter City Council has complied with the code and also meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, paragraph 4(3), which required all relevant bodies to prepare an Annual Governance Statement.

The Code of Governance sets out the seven principles of good governance and the arrangements the Council has put in place to meet each of these principles:

1. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the law
2. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
3. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits
4. Determining interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
5. Developing the Council's capacity. Including the capability of its leadership and individuals within it
6. Managing risk and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
7. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability

A copy of the Council's code is available on our website at [Code-of-corporate-governance-2019-20.pdf](#)

The Purpose of the Governance Framework

The governance framework comprises the systems, processes, culture and values, by which the authority is directed and controlled together with activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the authority to monitor the achievement of its purposes and to consider whether those purposes have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

The Council's 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. There is an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise risks to the achievement of Council policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood and impact of those risks being realised and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The governance framework has been in place at Exeter City Council for the year ended 31 March 2020 and up to the date of the approval of the annual statement of accounts.

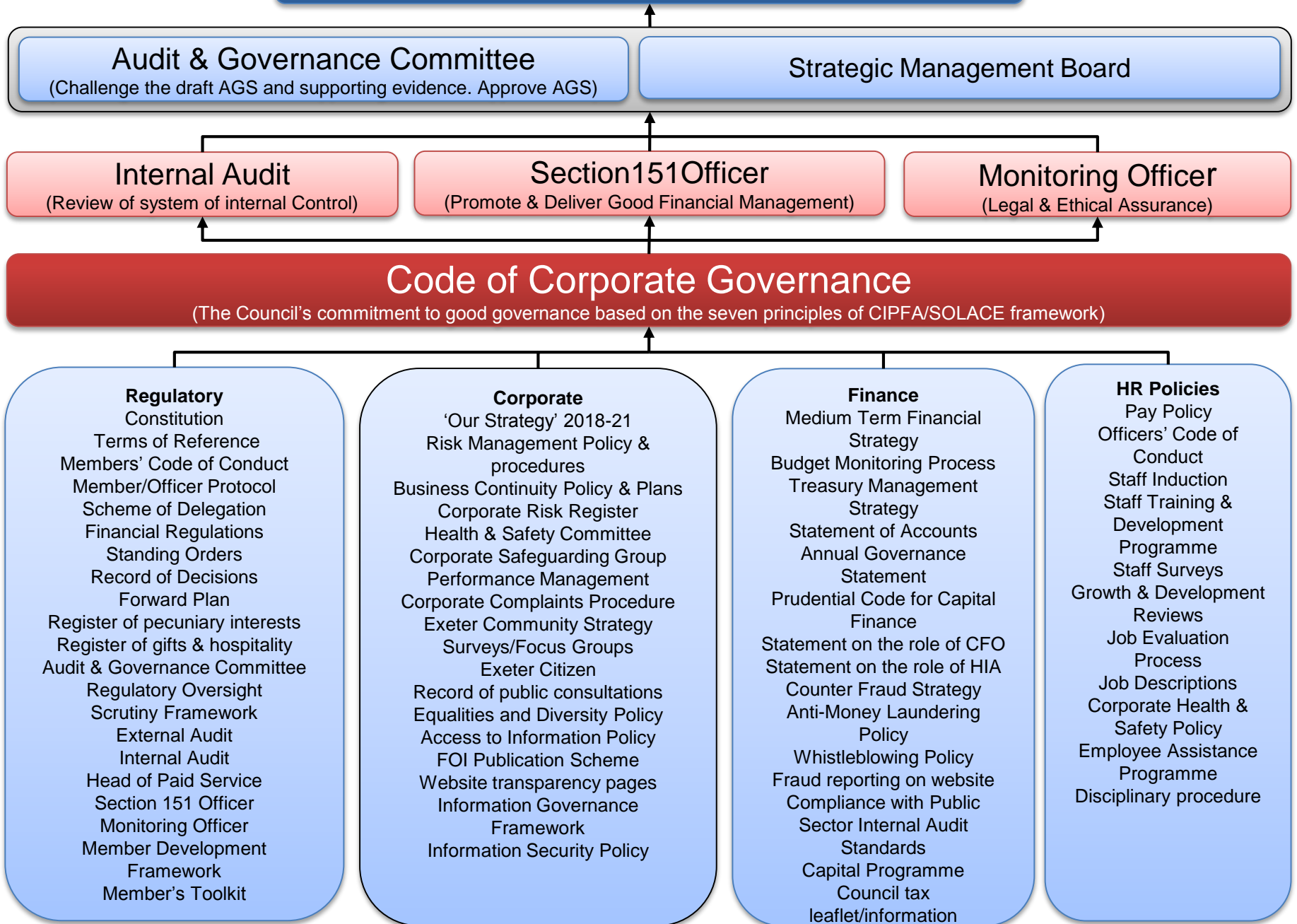
The Governance Framework

The Council's Governance Framework addresses the way the Council is controlled and managed, both strategically and operationally, and how it will deliver its services. The Framework recognises that the Council's business is focussed upon its corporate priorities and seeks to facilitate delivery to our local communities of the goals set out in the Council' Strategy 2018-21. The structures and processes, risk management and other internal control systems, such as standards of conduct, form part of this Framework, which is about managing the barriers to achieving the Council's objectives.

The local Code of Corporate Governance is reviewed annually through the Audit and Governance Committee and was last reviewed and recommended for approval by Council on 13 March 2020. Members and senior officers are responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of the Council's affairs and the stewardship of the resources at its disposal. This task is managed by the Strategic Management Board (SMB) which comprises the Chief Executive and Growth Director, Directors Chief Finance Officer (Section 151), City Solicitor (Monitoring Officer).

The Council has designed systems and processes to regulate, monitor and control its activities in order to achieve its vision and objectives. The Code of Corporate Governance sets out the controls in full.

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Review of effectiveness

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 Strategic Management Board who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment
- ✓ The work of Executive who are responsible for considering overall financial and performance management and receive comprehensive reports throughout the year;
- ✓ The work of both Customer Focus and Strategic Scrutiny Committees who monitor the overall financial performance of the Council;
- ✓ The work of the Audit & Governance Committee who monitor the standards of conduct of Members, effectiveness of risk management, the work of Internal Audit and the system of internal control;
- ✓ The Section 151 Officer who is responsible for delivering and overseeing the financial management of the Council
- ✓ The Monitoring Officer who provides assurance that the Council has complied with its statutory and regulatory obligations;
- ✓ Annual reviews of the Council's key financial and non financial systems by Internal Audit against known and evolving risks which are reported on a quarterly basis to the Audit & Governance Committee;
- ✓ Annual reviews of the Council's financial accounts and records by the External Auditors leading to their opinion as published in the year-end statements;
- ✓ Ongoing reviews of strategic and operational risks in each service area and the conduct of risk analysis and management in respect of major projects undertaken by the Council;
- ✓ Reviews and, where appropriate, updates of the Council's Constitution including Financial Regulations and Standing Orders
- ✓ Comments made by other review agencies and inspectorates

Risk Management

During the last twelve months the Council has been working with Zurich, the Council's insurance providers and Internal Audit, to review the Corporate Risk Register and to work with services to review their own operational Risk Registers. This has led to a streamlining of the Corporate Risk Register and a reduction in the number of risks recorded with many of the risks being moved to the Operational Risk Registers. The Risk Management Guidance has been updated accordingly. Zurich, supported by Internal Audit, have provided a number of briefing sessions to Managers to guide them through the risk management and business continuity process and to assist in the establishment or update of the Service's Risk Registers and Business Continuity Plans.

Financial Management Arrangements

The Council's financial management arrangements conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA "Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government" (2010) as set out in the "Application Note to Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework". The Section 151 Officer is a member of the Council's Strategic Management Board.

Internal Audit

The Internal Audit Service has been managed and delivered in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) which were introduced in April 2013. It is a requirement of the standards that an independent external review of Internal Audit's compliance with PSIAS is undertaken every five years. This external review was completed in January 2020 when the external assessor concluded that

"It is our overall opinion that the Exeter City Council Internal Audit Team generally conforms to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, including the Definition of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics and the Standards." Generally Conforms is the top rating and means that the internal audit service has a charter, policies and processes that are judged to be in conformance to the Standards.

Based on the assurance work undertaken by Internal Audit, the Audit Manager has provided an opinion on the adequacy of the control environment as part of the Annual Internal Audit Report which concluded that the key systems are operating soundly and that there are no fundamental breakdowns of controls resulting in material discrepancy.

External Audit

In January 2020, the Council's external auditor (Grant Thornton) issued the following conclusion:

'On the basis of our work, having regard to the guidance on the specified criterion issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in November 2017, we are satisfied that the Authority put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2019'.

Corporate Complaints

In 2019/20 the Council responded to 100 (2018/19 – 101) corporate customer complaints. All complaints were responded to by the relevant Director or Corporate Manager so that any issues identified could be actioned.

Performance Management

The Council's Corporate Plan 'Our Strategy 2018-21' was approved by Executive on 9th October 2018. To support this strategy, the Council's Operational Management Board were tasked with devising and implementing a performance management framework to show how the Council is progressing towards achieving strategic objectives and to prioritise resources. This framework has been drafted for approval by the Strategic Management Board. A strategic dashboard has also been built to enable reporting and monitoring against these objectives. In addition, all services have been working on services plans to link service objectives to corporate objectives, to analyse performance, identifying improvements and implement remedial actions.

Key Issues 2019-20

This Statement is intended to provide reasonable assurance. It is stressed that no system of control can provide absolute assurance against material misstatement or loss. In concluding this overview of the Council's governance arrangements, two key issues have been carried over from 19-20 as still ongoing, along with four significant issues identified for 2019-20 shown in the table below. Progress will be subject to regular monitoring by the Audit and Governance Committee.

Issue No.	Issue Identified	Summary of Action to be Taken
1 (18-19)	The Council continues to make changes to its organisational structures and ways of working as it transforms the way in which services are delivered within the financial constraints of the current economic climate. During 2019-20 the Council has also moved to an agile and flexible working environment. This has kept the overall risk to the internal control environment high with changes in staff responsibilities and the reduction of available resources.	This will continue to be monitored as part of the internal audit plan and any issues arising will be reported to Audit and Governance Committee quarterly.
2 (18-19)	The Council now has a fully functioning Procurement Team in place, which is effectively managing Council procurements. The next phase is to ensure that contract management is an integral part of the procurement cycle to ensure that it is undertaken effectively and consistently across the Council's contracts. In light of Covid19 and the need for ongoing social distancing for the foreseeable future, the planned rollout of contract management training across the organisation will be reviewed and options considered around virtual and online training.	<p>A contract management training plan to be implemented along with contract management guidance to assist contract managers to properly manage contracts by addressing transition management, performance monitoring and by helping to ensure that both parties fulfil their commercial and contractual commitments.</p> <p>This contract management training was due to be rolled out during the summer of 2020. However, due to Covid19 restrictions, this training has been postponed and will be rescheduled</p>

Key Issues 2019-20

Issue No.	Issue Identified	Summary of Action to be Taken
3 (19-20)	Due to the Covid19 pandemic and the lockdown measures that were put in place in March 2020, the Council is facing increased cost and demand pressures at the same time as seeing a significant drop in income. Support from Central Government has mitigated some of the pressures, but the longer term impact could still be damaging to the Council's financial position.	<p>The Government have provided grants to cover expenditure pressures.</p> <p>The Government have committed to covering most of the losses from sales, fees and charges.</p> <p>The Council has taken an emergency budget to be considered on 21 July 2020, identifying ways to ensure a balanced budget.</p>
4 (19-20)	Due to the Covid19 pandemic and the lockdown measures that were put in place in March 2020, the Government has laid new regulations before Parliament to allow for virtual Council meetings to be held.	<p>The Council was the first to use the new regulations, holding a meeting of the Executive virtually, two days after the regulations came into force.</p> <p>Initial meetings were held via Skype for Business, but this has been replaced by Zoom. All meetings are streamed live via Facebook as they were previously to enable the public to view all Council business transparently. Members of the Public can also "attend" the meeting to ask questions using the normal notification procedure.</p>
5 (19-20)	The move to an agile and flexible working environment as part of the Organisational Development Plan will impact on the control environment in some instances, which will require a review and in some cases adaptation of existing controls.	Audit Plan will be updated to prioritise those services where the new working from home environment has resulted in a change to working practices and controls.
6 (19-20)	The Covid19 pandemic has created a significant increase in fraud risk. The Council has already experienced at least one instance of a fraudster attempting to change a suppliers bank details. Grant schemes always attract individuals hoping to exploit the system and with the Government Covid19 grants schemes this risk has also further increased.	<p>Internal audit are currently undertaking a risk assessment on behalf of the Council, as required by the government, to assess the level of risk the Council may be exposed to as a result of administering the Small Business, Hospitality and Leisure and the Discretionary Grants.</p> <p>Internal Audit will also be undertaking post award checking following guidance issued by the government.</p>

Approval of the Annual Governance Statement

Through the action referred to on the previous page, we propose over the coming year to focus on the key areas, with a view to further enhancing our governance arrangements and we will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Signed:

Councillor Tony Wardle
Chair of Audit & Governance Committee

Date:

Signed:

Dave Hodgson CPFA
Chief Finance Officer & Section 151 Officer

Date:

Signed:

Councillor Philip Bialyk
Leader of the Council

Date:

Signed:

Karime Hassan
Chief Executive & Growth Director

Date: