

WARRINGTON
Borough Council



DRAFT
ANNUAL GOVERNANCE
STATEMENT
2023-2024

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Warrington Borough Council Vision

Corporate Strategy 2022-2024:

Our residents live healthy, happy and independent lives; everyone benefits from our thriving economy; communities are safe, strong and our most vulnerable are protected; our town is clean, green and vibrant.

1. Corporate Governance

Corporate Governance is about how the Council ensures that it is doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. Good governance ensures that the Council provides for effective leadership and management in the use of public money; ensures the delivery of high quality services to all taxpayers and citizens; and achieves the desired outcomes for service users and communities.

Warrington Borough Council acknowledges its responsibility for ensuring that there is a sound system of governance. The Council has developed a Local Code of Corporate Governance that defines the principles that underpin the governance of the organisation. The Code can be obtained by writing to the Council's Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services. The principles upon which it is based are summarised in this Statement.

2. The Annual Governance Statement

The Accounts & Audit (England) Regulations 2015 require the Council to prepare and publish an Annual Governance Statement. This is a public document that reports on the extent to which the Council complies with its own Code of Corporate Governance. The Annual Governance Statement explains how the Council makes decisions; manages its resources in line with the Council's priorities; and achieves the required outcomes for service users and communities.

In the Annual Governance Statement the Council:

- Acknowledges its responsibility for ensuring that there is a sound system of governance
- Summarises the key elements of the governance framework and the roles of those responsible for the development and maintenance of the governance environment (section 3)
- Describes how the Council has monitored and evaluated the effectiveness of its governance arrangements in the year (section 4)

Provides details of how the Council has responded to any issue(s) identified in last year's governance statement and reports any new significant governance issues arising in 2023/24 (section 5).

3. The Governance Framework

Scope of Responsibility:

Warrington Borough Council is responsible for ensuring that:

- Business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards
- Public money is safeguarded, 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, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

Purpose of the Governance Framework:

The Council's governance framework comprises the systems, processes, cultures and values by which the Council is directed and controlled and activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate services and value for money. The framework aims to ensure that in conducting its business the Council:

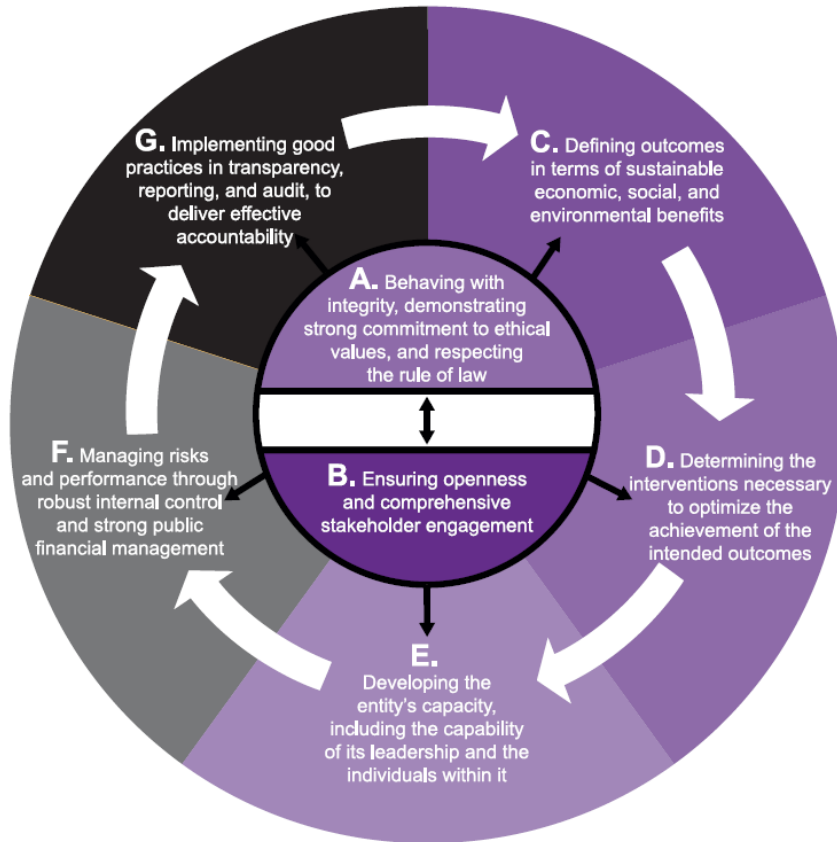
- Operates in a lawful, open, inclusive and honest manner
- Makes sure that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively
- Has effective arrangements for the management of risk
- Secures continuous improvements in the way that it operates

The Governance Framework:

The governance framework sets out how the Council is operating in order to demonstrate compliance, ongoing improvement, its commitment to maintaining the highest ethical standards and levels of governance. The governance framework has been in place at Warrington Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2024 and up to the date of approval of the statement of accounts. The Council

has based its governance framework on the CIPFA/SOLACE guidance 2016 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government'. The framework sets out seven core principles for good governance. These are summarized in the graphic below:

THE PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

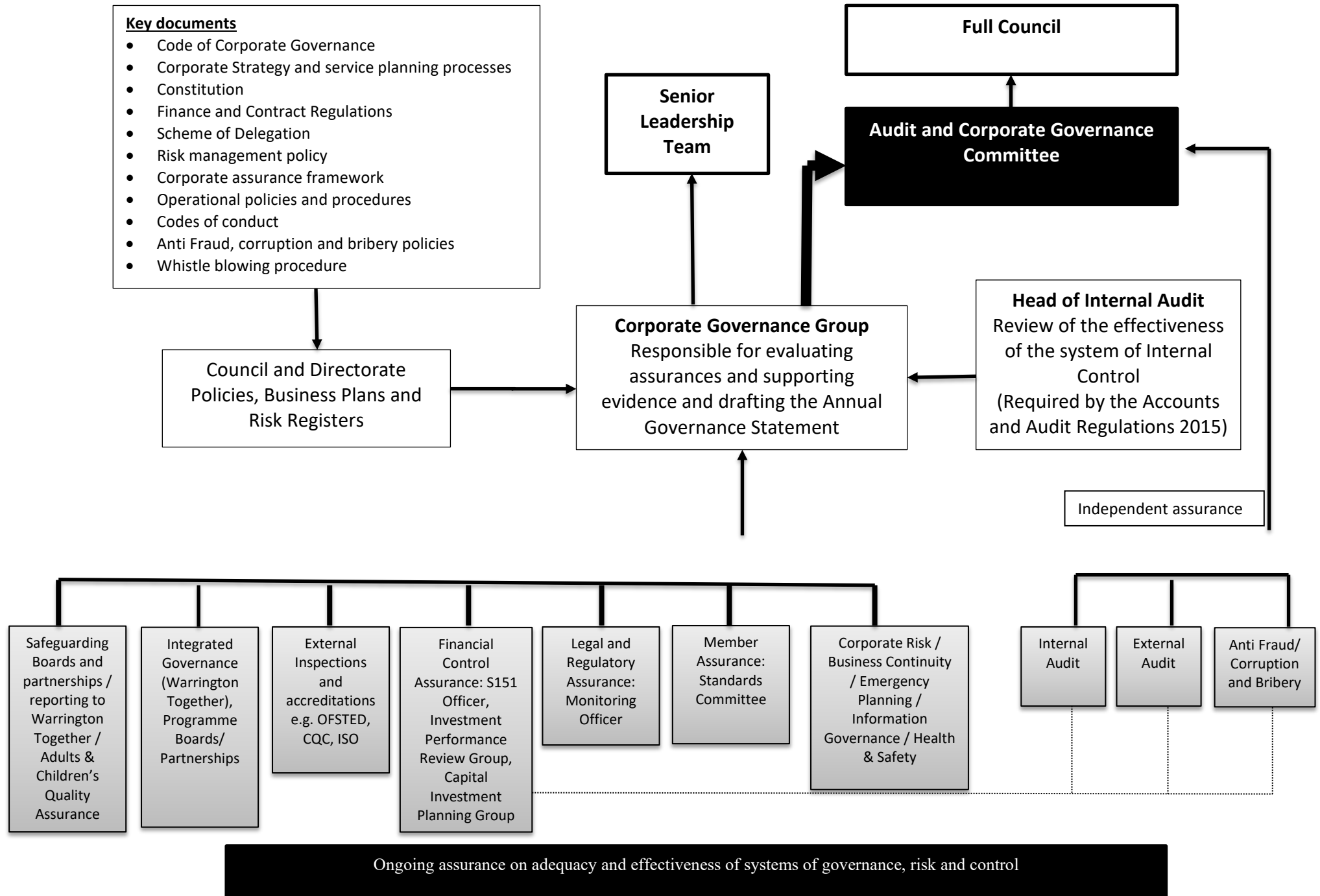


The Council has put in place a framework to ensure its compliance with these principles. This is summarized in the diagram on the following page.

WARRINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Key documents

- Code of Corporate Governance
- Corporate Strategy and service planning processes
- Constitution
- Finance and Contract Regulations
- Scheme of Delegation
- Risk management policy
- Corporate assurance framework
- Operational policies and procedures
- Codes of conduct
- Anti Fraud, corruption and bribery policies
- Whistle blowing procedure



Council and Directorate
Policies, Business Plans and
Risk Registers

Corporate Governance Group
Responsible for evaluating
assurances and supporting
evidence and drafting the Annual
Governance Statement

Head of Internal Audit
Review of the effectiveness of
the system of Internal
Control
(Required by the Accounts
and Audit Regulations 2015)

Independent assurance

Safeguarding
Boards and
partnerships /
reporting to
Warrington
Together /
Adults &
Children's
Quality
Assurance

Integrated
Governance
(Warrington
Together),
Programme
Boards/
Partnerships

External
Inspections
and
accreditations
e.g. OFSTED,
CQC, ISO

Financial
Control
Assurance: S151
Officer,
Investment
Performance
Review Group,
Capital
Investment
Planning Group

Legal and
Regulatory
Assurance:
Monitoring
Officer

Member
Assurance:
Standards
Committee

Corporate Risk /
Business Continuity
/ Emergency
Planning /
Information
Governance / Health
& Safety

Internal
Audit

External
Audit

Anti Fraud/
Corruption
and Bribery

Ongoing assurance on adequacy and effectiveness of systems of governance, risk and control

4. Review of Effectiveness

Warrington Borough 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 Team who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Head of Internal Audit's annual report and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

INTERNAL ASSURANCES

Code of Corporate Governance

The council's Code of Corporate Governance was reviewed at the start of 2024. The Code was updated to reflect any changes in the council's governance framework during the year and some changes were made to reduce duplication and improve clarity of the document. The results of the review were reported to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee at its meeting on 18 January 2024.

Corporate Strategy

The Council's Corporate Strategy 2020-2024 was published in 2020 following Full Council approval in September 2020. The strategy set out the council's pledges, priorities, and values. The strategy has been refreshed annually to ensure the priorities remain relevant, with each refresh being agreed by Cabinet. The annual refresh includes achievements for the previous year. Delivery of the priorities is monitored quarterly by Directorate managements teams, Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Cabinet. The strategy is supported by a performance dashboard with key performance indicators and targets.

The current strategy ends in 2024 and a new long-term strategy will be developed with Cabinet and SLT during the year.

[Link to Corporate Strategy.](#)

Constitutional review

The council's Constitution was reviewed during the year, to ensure that it remains up to date and effective and reflects any significant changes in legislation. Full Council approved some revisions at its meeting on 15 April 2024: the key changes related to:

- Revised health overview and scrutiny committee arrangements arising from the creation of Integrated Care Boards and Integrated Care Partnerships
- The transfer of ownership and control of the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership to the relevant local authorities and the establishment of a Joint Committee to provide oversight and direction to the Partnership
- Streamlining some aspects of the decisions-making processes of the Development Management Committee

Some changes were made to the council's Financial Procedure Rules in December 2023 to provide greater clarity around processes required to support the acquisition and disposal of the council's land and property. The council's governance and decision-making processes remain under review.

Risk Management

The Council's strategic risk management arrangements are underpinned by the strategic risk register, which is reviewed regularly by risk leads, with support from the Risk and Insurance Manager, and presented to the Senior Leadership Team quarterly, and Cabinet, and the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee half-yearly. Recognising that risk registers are not the only way to communicate information about risk, the Council has been pleased to see that risk leads have engaged proactively with the updated format of the register and have proposed risks for escalation and de-escalation from the register as controls take effect or circumstances change. Risk ratings have also been subject to regular scrutiny and update as the year has progressed.

At the start of 2023/24, the strategic risk register contained 27 risks, 7 of which were scored at 20 or more, meaning these risks were considered probable or almost certain to occur, with a serious or severe impact for the Council. During the year, two new risks were escalated to the register, and six were de-escalated for ongoing oversight by directorate management teams. Four risks were assessed as improving, and seven as worsening. At the close of 2023/24 therefore, the strategic risk register contained fewer risks, 23 in total, but with a higher concentration of highly rated risks, with 11 scoring at 20 or more.

The strategic risk register provides a useful overview of the Council's risk environment, containing risks that reflect national and sector-wide concerns, some of which are recorded on the National Risk Register, as well as Council specific issues. National and sector-wide risks recognised by the Council include cyber-attacks; future epidemic or pandemic outbreaks; pressures on social care and services for children with SEND; homelessness; financial stability; and risks relating to the implementation of statutory requirements for waste collection and the provision of accommodation-based support for people experiencing domestic abuse. Council specific risks have included arrangements for the adoption of the Local Plan and the viability of the Council's leisure, libraries and lifestyles provider, LiveWire.

Corporate Assurance Framework

During 2023-24, Internal Audit have continued to work on developing the council's corporate assurance framework. The purpose of the framework is to support the council's governance arrangements by identifying and assessing the level of assurance available against the council's key activities and strategic risks. This assurance can be provided by management oversight, internal control operations, the work of internal and external audit and through external reviews and assessments (for example OFSTED and CQC inspections, external accreditations). Much of this information already exists, but the assurance framework looks to pull all this information together in one place, to enable those charged with governance to assess where assurance is provided and where additional assurance may need to be obtained.

To support the annual review of effectiveness, all heads of service were issued with a senior managers' assurance statement for completion. The statement consists of self-evaluation questions for each of the key areas contained in the CIPFA / SOLACE good governance guide, for managers to identify either good practice or areas for further development. The results of the assessments have been used to identify opportunities for providing additional training and support – no areas were identified from this exercise that would require disclosure as a significant governance issue in the AGS.

Whistleblowing procedure

The Organisational Improvement and Development Committee has oversight of the council's whistleblowing procedure. Updates on the effectiveness of the whistleblowing reporting arrangements were discussed by the Committee in March 2023 and March 2024. Outcomes from whistleblowing referrals are also reported twice-yearly to Audit and Corporate Governance Committee as part of the counter fraud update reports. The associated policies were approved by the Joint Consultative Committee in 2021 and will be subject to review during 2024/25.

EXTERNAL ASSURANCES

Set out below are summaries of external assurances received in relation to key governance areas in the council in 2023-24, with links to published documents containing further detail, where relevant.

LGA Peer Review

The Local Government Association undertook a Peer Review in the council in March 2024. The report from the Peer Review team is expected in June: draft actions have already been shared with Senior Leadership Team to prepare for implementation with the new administration following the May elections.

Children's Social Care

An LGA Peer Review of Children in Care and Care Leavers Service was commissioned in June 2022 to consider how well the council meet our statutory duties to children in care and care leavers. The LGA found we have continued the progress made in this area since our last full Ofsted Inspection: *"It is clear from the self-assessment and from the evidence gathered by the peer team that Warrington is an organisation that knows itself well and is aware of what needs to be done."*

[Link to Peer review report](#)

The annual cross-remit meeting with OFSTED took place in May 2024, covering children's social care, early years, schools and further education and skills. Some of the key outcomes from this included:

Social care

- Organisational changes made in line with government reforms and to support successful pathfinder bid for families first for children programme
- Partnership working is strong, despite the challenges of the integrated care partnership
- Staff turnover has decreased, with recruitment into key roles
- Budget pressures are being addressed through transformation programmes and increasing internal provision

Early years

- 100% of settings are currently rated good or outstanding
- The council works closely with partners on the education recovery strategy and the community early education pathway
- There are sufficient childcare places to meet demand; take up of place for two year-olds continues to improve

Schools

- There is a multi-agency approach to attendance, with the supporting families grant used to add capacity and resource

- There is multi-agency working to identify risks to children out of school
- Attendance figures for primary, secondary and special schools are better than the national averages

Further education and skills

- There is an increasing cohort of young people in Warrington who are at risk of becoming NEET following the COVID-19 pandemic and other issues, such as post-16 qualification reforms. The council is focusing on careers earlier, with data sharing between schools and post-16 providers and information on opportunities being provided to pupils at a younger age.
- Alternative technical and vocational routes are being developed in the town.

In February 2023, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission jointly inspected arrangements across education, health and care services to understand how well members of Warrington's Partnership work together to improve the experiences of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and disabilities (SEND). It highlighted that senior leaders across the Warrington Partnership were ambitious for children and young people with SEND. Inspectors also found a number of areas where Warrington Partnership is making a positive difference to improve the lives of children and young people with SEND. Warrington Borough Council was the first local authority in the region to be inspected under the new framework. Governance was highlighted as a strength within the inspection.

In response to the inspection, Warrington has refreshed its SEND Strategy and Improvement Plan to tackle the challenges across the SEND system; its top priority is to improve compliance with the 20 week timeframe for finalising Education, Health and Care plans.

[Link to OFSTED report](#)

Adult social care

The Council commissioned the Local Government Association to undertake a peer challenge around adult social care, to prepare for a future assessment by the Care Quality Commission of care at the local authority and integrated care system level. The peer review's main findings were that:

- Adult Social Care is well led and we identified a strong and unified culture with a clear focus on doing the best for Warrington communities
- There are strong strategic partnerships across Warrington, with Warrington Borough Council respected as a valued partner and leader in the Health and Care system
- Adult Social Care is self-aware around its strengths and areas for improvement and will now need to deliver plans to address areas of improvement at pace

- The Council should prioritise work to agree, and then implement, comprehensive strategies around co-production and equality, diversity and inclusion
- The Council should develop ways to better evidence the impact of your work in terms of outcomes for people and value for money
- The Council should review how waiting lists are managed for assessment and care and agree clear plans for addressing these

There have been no other inspections of CQC regulated services this year although the directorate is planning well for a CQC inspection of Adult Social Care that we expect to take place like other councils in the next two years.

Planning

The Council received and published the Local Plan Inspectors’ Report in October 2023 which confirmed that the Local Plan, incorporating a number of Modifications, was sound. The Council subsequently adopted the Local Plan at a meeting of Full Council on 4th December 2023. The Warrington Local Plan 2021/22 – 2038/39 is now the statutory development plan for the whole for the Borough.

On 10 January 2024, Brooklyn Limited made an application for permission for a statutory review of the Council’s decision to adopt the Local Plan. On 19 March 2024, the High Court ordered that the application be refused and the Claimant did not appeal this decision. There are no other claims against the adoption of the Local Plan.

[Link to Council's Planning policy homepage](#)

This draft Annual Governance Statement has been reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT); Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Corporate Services; the Monitoring Officer; and the Head of Internal Audit before being presented to the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee for approval.

The Council relies on the following sources of assurance in order to maintain and review the effectiveness of the system of governance:

- **Member scrutiny** – Standards Sub-Committee; Overview and Scrutiny function; Constitution Sub-Committee; Cabinet; Audit and Corporate Governance Committee.

In 2023/24, the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee commissioned CIPFA to undertake an independent review of its effectiveness. The draft report was presented at a special session of the Committee in April 2024. The report contains twelve recommendations: responses to these will be finalised with the Chair of the Committee when committee membership has been

<p>agreed following the May all out elections. The Committee has also approved the appointment of two new independent members, who are due to take up their positions from the July meeting.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management - The Senior Leadership Team has responsibility for developing the Risk Management Strategy and processes, including the communications and reporting structure for strategic risk. The Strategic Risk and Business Continuity Group has met regularly during the year to discuss risk matters and identify items for potential escalation to the strategic register.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management - Directors and Deputy Directors have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment and provide formal assurance to Directorate Management Teams by their responses to the assurance statement questionnaires. The results of the self-assessment exercise for 2023/24 are to be reviewed by the Corporate Governance Group, with a view to identifying any matters of concern that should be included in the Annual Governance Statement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Review – The Corporate Governance Group meets regularly during the year and maintains a work plan to ensure continuous improvement of the governance arrangements in place. The Group considered the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 at a dedicated meeting in May 2024 and has reviewed the items proposed for inclusion as significant governance issues. The Group reports on its work annually to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audit – Internal Audit Services examine the effectiveness of the Council’s internal controls. Based upon the work undertaken during 2023/24 and in preceding years, the Head of Internal Audit provided the Council with a generally ‘satisfactory’ assurance opinion on the control framework and on the controls reviewed as part of the internal audit work. The opinion for 2023/24 has not been able to consider key assurances from the Council’s external auditors in relation to the accounts from 2019/20 onwards. The opinion also excludes assurance from a proposed external review of the council’s commercial investments, as this work has not yet been completed. These issues will be set out in more detail in the Annual Report and Head of Audit Opinion on the System of Internal Control for 2023/24, which will be presented to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee at its meeting on 17 July 2024.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Audit - The audit of the 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22 accounts has not been commenced or concluded. Grant Thornton (current external auditor) have concluded their audit of both the 2017/18 and 2018/19 accounts reporting their findings to Audit and Corporate Governance Committee on 16th June 2022 and 17th April 2024 respectively, although due to a national issue relating to the accounting of infrastructure assets, the 17/18 accounts were not formally signed off until March 2023. For 2023/24 and for previous accounts not yet audited, the external auditor will be Mazars LLP, appointed by PSAA to replace Grant Thornton as the Authority’s external auditor. The current audit backlog is subject to pending legislation in respect of a ‘backstop date’ by which point local bodies would publish audited accounts for all outstanding years up to and including 2022/23. At the time of writing, the exact form of the audit approach to those years has not been defined.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-fraud, corruption and bribery – the council has a dedicated Counter Fraud Team in place that carries out both reactive and proactive work to mitigate internal and external fraud risks. The Team produces an annual report summarising its work: the 2023/24 report was presented to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee at its meeting on 11 April 2024 and concluded that the council had adequate arrangements in place to manage the risk of fraud, bribery and corruption.

- **External Review** – Review and any findings and feedback from reviews carried out by external inspectorates such as OFSTED and the CQC.

5. Significant Governance Issues and actions arising

The 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement remains in draft as the accounts for that year have not yet been audited. The 2022/23 Statement reported six significant governance issues for the Council. Five of these are considered to have remained significant governance issues in 2023/24 and one is no longer considered to be significant. An update on these is included in this section.

Significant governance issues at the current time are as follows:

Best Value Inspection (new issue)

As reported in last year's Annual Governance Statement (see below), the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities commissioned CIPFA to undertake a review of the council's investment and debt profile. Following the publication of CIPFA's report, the government announced on 8 May that they would be conducting an independent Best Value Inspection into the council. The remit of the inspection is the following areas:

- The council's level of borrowing - £1.8 billion - for "invest and return" and regeneration, which we have always accepted makes us an "outlier" compared to other councils
- The outcome of the CIPFA review. As stated below, the council has already worked to implement a number of actions and improvements, and has previously submitted a draft action plan to government on this.
- Aspects of external audit, particularly around the council's approach to accounting for Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)
- Some specific instances of decision-making linked to our commercial strategy

At the time of writing this Annual Governance Statement, the Best Value Inspection was in progress.

Value for Money Opinion – 2018/19 accounts

In April 2024, Grant Thornton presented their Audit Findings Report to the Council's Audit & Corporate Governance Committee. The audit opinion on the 18/19 accounts was subject to a limitation of scope which concerned events relating to Solar Farms after the reporting period. This limitation was agreed by the Council.

The Auditors qualified their 2018-19 Value for Money conclusion, making several recommendations in their prior year Audit Findings Report (relating to 2017/18 accounts) published in June 2022. The Council has accepted the Audit Findings Report recommendations and in the update to the Annual Governance Statement for 2018/19 committed to ensuring a full action plan is collated once all outstanding

reviews are published. This action plan will be presented to Audit & Corporate Governance Committee at the earliest available opportunity for review.

The Audit Findings Report concluded that the audit work 'has not identified any events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the Council's or Group's ability to continue as a going concern over the next 12 months. Like most local authorities, the Council is having to make difficult decisions in order to set a balanced budget. However, the Council has been able to achieve a balanced budget in 2023/24 and has sufficient reserves and assets to mitigate any financial risks over the next 12 months.'

Together Energy

The administration of Together Energy (TE) has been progressed by FRP Advisory, the court-appointed administrators. Following discussions with Orsted, the administrator has confirmed to the Council that its guarantee to Orsted (the wholesale energy supplier to TE) is no longer required and therefore can be released. Accordingly, the Council's potential liability declined to £36.85m, consisting of £18.85m of loans and £8.899m of preference share capital (once the original £18m has been adjusted for the prudent impairment to the equity that the Council made in 2021/22).

The hedge position of TE has been liquidated. In addition, the parent company Together Energy Limited (TEL), where the Council has its debt and equity holdings, had significant cash balances based on collection of outstanding amounts from customers. FRP are finalising the administration and it is forecast that the Council will get all of its loan money back (£18.899m), but not the remaining share capital. The Council in the 2023/24 accounts are impairing the equity investment down to zero (£9.308m was impaired in 2021/22). It is currently forecast that any loss on the equity investment will be mitigated by revenues earned by TE during our period of ownership, accrued interest owing to the Council and premium repayments from the repayment of PWLB loans.

Integrated Care System

The Integrated Care System (ICS) is now in place and maturing. As there are Committees in the structure which have formal status as joint committees there needs to be reference to it in the Constitution. Whilst setting up the ICS framework both locally and regionally there have been some interim measures in the Constitution to allow the Council to be represented.

Whilst further change and development are expected it was proposed at full council on 22nd May 2023 that a new section is introduced into the Constitution to explain and recognise the Council's involvement in the ICS and to allow appointments and decision-making powers to be put in place.

Arrangements for the establishment of the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Cheshire and Merseyside were completed in 2022. A report was brought to Council on 20 June 2022 and Council agreed to adopt the updated Protocol for the Establishment of Joint Health Scrutiny Arrangements in Cheshire and Merseyside which were included at Part 5, Section E of the Council's constitution.

The Sub-Committee recommended to full Council that the Constitution is amended to include a section on the ICS, including appointments and decision-making powers for those councillors and officers involved in the integrated care work. The Sub-Committee recommended to full Council that the ICS section of the Constitution can be updated by the Monitoring Officer to incorporate changes/developments to the ICS governance framework and terms of reference for ICS Committees. Council approved the proposals as presented.

On a place footprint, governance arrangements are in place via the Place Lead and Director for Adult Social Care's co-chaired Warrington Together Partnership Board, a co-ordinating function for councillors, council and partner officers to oversee delivery of the Health & Wellbeing Board's strategy.

External Capital Review Summary

During 2023, the Council, was advised of a Capital Review to be undertaken by CIPFA requested by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

The objectives of the review were stated as follows:

Firstly, to assess the level of risk that the council is exposed to due to its current debt and investment profile and future capital plans. In assessing this, the review should consider both the inherent risk and the council's arrangements to manage risk. The review must consider the forward position of the council and the level of risk to financial stability due to sensitivity to changes in future assumptions.

Secondly, to include as part of the considerations of the review whether it is appropriate and necessary for the councils to take actions to reduce its risk (for example, by reducing debt), and the options by which the council may do this and the viability of such options. The report should provide recommendations that can reasonably inform the government's and council's consideration of further actions.

The focus of the review was intended to be on the financial risks arising due to the council's investment and debt profile; with the review to consider other elements of the council's finances so far as they are relevant.

Warrington Borough Council was one of a number of Local Authorities across the country to be subject to a similar review. As mentioned above, the final version of the report was issued in May 2024. The council has commenced work on implementing the eight

recommendations contained in the report, subject to any additional actions arising from the current Best Value Inspection. The final report is due to go to Cabinet in June or July, followed by Audit and Corporate Governance Committee.

Climate Change

Climate change has been recognised by the council as a significant governance issue based on the threat that it poses across society. In line with the council's climate and sustainability policy:

- A climate emergency action plan was adopted in May 2023 and a new corporate climate emergency group established to oversee delivery of the plan.
- A monitoring system has been established to deliver regular quarterly progress reports on the plan's implementation.
- Progress against the council's carbon budget has been reported alongside the financial budget.
- To highlight climate change issues as part of the decision-making process, a "climate change and sustainability implications" section is now included in the report template for council cabinet reports.
- There has been good progress with the delivery of Carbon Literacy training. By the end of March 2024, 365 individuals had undertaken the training including 323 officers and 42 elected members.
- The council continues to support the Warrington Climate Emergency Commission a multi-organisation forum established to lead the wider conversation and encourage action across Warrington. The commission has previously developed a borough-wide strategy to signal the direction of travel the borough needs to move in. It has since produced its first annual report to chart progress.

Governance issue from 2022/23 no longer considered significant

LiveWire Leisure and Libraries

Throughout 2023-24, the Council continued to explore options for securing the ongoing delivery of leisure and library services. This was in the context of significant financial challenges faced by LiveWire CIC, who have been contracted to manage the services since May 2012.

In July 2023, Cabinet made a number of decisions about the future of leisure and libraries services, including to not proceed in providing subsidy to LiveWire CIC following a referral to, and report from, the Competition and Markets Authority. It also discounted a number of alternative delivery models following options analysis, but to proceed with the bringing in-house of the services, establishing an insourcing programme, but also to proceed with a procurement process to assess the current external provider market conditions.

In December 2023, the findings from the procurement process were presented back to Cabinet, alongside the programme for insourcing. Cabinet re-confirmed its decision to bring in-house the services and approved the transfer of all services, staff, assets and liabilities into direct Council management. Services were transferred on 1st March 2024.

LiveWire services have been transferred into the existing Growth Directorate, under management of the Head of Inclusive Economy, Leisure and Culture. Governance arrangements are in the process of being integrated into standard Council processes. Appropriate budgetary provisions have been included within the Medium Term Financial Plan.

The successful insourcing of Livewire addresses the main risk identified in last year's Annual Governance Statement, but the service will be kept under close review during 2023/24 as the new service delivery model beds in.

6. Conclusion

The review of the Council's governance arrangements for 2023/24 has been undertaken in order to produce this statement and to ensure the effectiveness of governance arrangements in place and compliance with the code of corporate governance. The review highlighted a number of governance issues that require attention and action is being planned and/or taken as noted in the statement.

With the exception of the significant governance issues that we have outlined in this statement, our review confirms that the Council has a generally sound system of internal controls that supports the achievement of its policies, aims and objectives and that those control issues have been or are being addressed.

Signed:

.....
Councillor Rydzkowski
Chair of the Audit and Corporate
Governance Committee

Date:

Signed:

.....
Matthew Cumberbatch
Monitoring Officer

Date:.....

Signed:

.....
Councillor Mundry
Leader of the Council

Date:

Signed:

.....
Professor Steven Broomhead
Chief Executive

Date:.....