

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE

20 June 2012

Annual Governance Statement 2011/12

Purpose of the report

1. To ask the Audit Committee to consider a draft Annual Governance Statement for 2011/12 for preliminary comment before final approval is sought from the Committee at its meeting on 7 September 2011.

Background

2. The Council is required, as part of its annual review of the effectiveness of its governance arrangements, to produce an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2011/12. This will be signed by the Leader of the Council and the Corporate Directors after final approval by the Audit Committee on 7 September 2012 and forms part of the Statement of Accounts.
3. Based on advice from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), the AGS should include:
 - an acknowledgement of responsibility for ensuring there is a sound system of governance, incorporating the system of internal control;
 - an indication of the level of assurance that the systems and processes that comprise the Council's governance arrangements can provide;
 - a brief description of the key elements of the governance framework, including reference to group activities where those activities are significant;
 - a brief description of the process that has been applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance arrangements;
 - an outline of the actions taken, or proposed, to deal with significant governance issues, including an agreed action plan.

4. The AGS for Wiltshire Council should demonstrate how the Council is meeting the six principles of good governance adopted in its Code of Corporate Governance. These principles are:
 - focusing on the purpose of the Council and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area;
 - councillors and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles;
 - promoting values for the council and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour;
 - taking informal and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk;
 - developing the capacity and capability of councillors and officers to be effective;
 - engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust accountability.
5. The AGS is primarily retrospective. It reports on the assurance framework and measures in place for the financial year 2011/12, but must take account of any significant issues of governance up to the date of publication in September 2012. The AGS should outline the actions taken or proposed to address any significant governance issues identified.
6. The AGS is drafted by members of the Governance Assurance Group, which comprises senior officers who have lead roles in corporate governance and member representatives from the Audit Committee and the Standards Committee.
7. The evidence for the AGS comes from a variety of sources, including an assurance framework, directors' assurance statements, relevant lead officers within the organisation and external auditors and inspection agencies.

Draft AGS - Content

8. A copy of the draft AGS for 2011/12 is attached at Appendix 1.
9. The draft reflects the elements described in paragraph 3 of this report and has regard to revised guidance from CIPFA. The draft is based on work undertaken to date and will be revised in the light of further work by the Governance Assurance Group and any observations of this Committee,

Cabinet, the Standards Committee and the Council's external auditors, KPMG.

10. Section C of the AGS describes the Council's governance framework for the relevant period - April 2011 to date. The final version will need to reflect the position up to the date of approval and signature in September 2012.
11. Section D provides a review of the effectiveness of the Council's governance framework. This section has been structured to reflect the key governance principles set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.
12. The levels of assurance obtained from the range of audits completed during the year has led Internal Audit to the overall audit opinion that for 2011-12 it is able to give reasonable assurance on the adequacy and effective operation of the Council's overall control environment. KPMG's interim audit report 2011/12 supports this in its finding that the Council's organisational control environment is effective overall.
13. The Governance Assurance Group is obtaining assurance statements from directors in relation to their services. These will be reviewed and any issues which impact upon the Council's governance arrangements will be included in a further revision of the draft AGS and highlighted at the next meeting.
14. Section E of the draft AGS requires the Council to identify any significant internal control issues affecting the Council during the relevant period.
15. CIPFA guidance suggests that an internal control issue is to be regarded as significant if:
 - the issue has seriously prejudiced or prevented achievement of a principal objective;
 - the issue has resulted in a need to seek additional funding to allow it to be resolved, or has resulted in significant diversion of resources from another aspect of the business;
 - the issue has led to a material impact on the accounts;
 - the audit committee, or equivalent, has advised that it should be considered significant for this purpose;
 - the Head of Internal Audit has reported on it as significant, for this purpose, in the annual opinion on the internal control environment;
 - the issue, or its impact, has attracted significant public interest or has seriously damaged the reputation of the organisation;

- the issue has resulted in formal action being taken by the Chief Financial Officer and/or the Monitoring Officer.

16. The following have been identified as significant governance issues at this stage in view of their size, complexity and impact on the delivery of the Council's priorities:

- Transfer of Public Health functions
- Safeguarding and Looked after Children Services
- Implementation of the Transformation Programme
- Managing significant reductions in Government funding and changes in legislation

17. Details on these issues are set out at paragraph 91 of the draft AGS.

18. The Assurance Group will continue to review the various sources of assurance and any variation or further significant governance issues that are identified will be reported to the meeting of Audit Committee in September for final consideration and approval.

19. KPMG will be consulted on the draft AGS and their comments will be taken into account in the presentation of the final version to the Committee in September.

Financial implications

20. There are no financial implications arising directly from the issues covered in this report.

Risk Assessment

21. The production of the AGS is a statutory requirement. Ongoing review of the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements is an important part of the Council's risk management strategy.

Environmental Impact

22. There is no environmental impact regarding the proposals in this report.

Equality and Diversity Impact

23. There are no equality and diversity issues arising from this report.

Reasons for the Proposal

24. To prepare the AGS 2011/12 for publication in accordance with the requirements of the Audit and Accounts Regulations.

Proposal

25. The Committee is, therefore, asked:

- a. to consider the draft AGS as set out in Appendix 1 and to make any amendments or observations on the content;
- b. to note that the draft AGS will be revised in the light of any comments this Committee may wish to make and the ongoing review work by the Governance Assurance Group. It will then be considered by Cabinet and the new Standards Committee before being brought back to this Committee for final approval and publication by 30 September 2012.

Ian Gibbons
Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer

Report Authors: Ian Gibbons and Marie Lindsay, Ethical Governance Officer

Unpublished documents relied upon in the production of this report:

None.