

COLCHESTER BOROUGH COUNCIL ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2015

Scope of responsibility

Colchester Borough 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. Colchester Borough 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, Colchester Borough Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and which includes arrangements for the management of risk. The Council is also responsible for ensuring that any companies owned by the Council, and any jointly operated services, also have proper arrangements in place for the governance of their affairs.

Colchester Borough Council has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*. A copy of the code is on the Council website at www.colchester.gov.uk or can be obtained from Colchester Borough Council, Rowan House, 33 Sheepen Road, Colchester, CO3 3WG.

This statement explains how Colchester Borough Council has complied with the code and also meets the requirements of regulation 4 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011 in relation to the publication of a statement on internal control.

DELIVERING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

The purpose of the governance framework

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

The 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. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of Colchester Borough Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The governance framework has been in place at Colchester Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2015 and up to the date of approval of the annual accounts.

Elements of the Framework

The framework consists of comprehensive processes that each ensure that the Authority complies with the principals of good governance. These include:

- **The Strategic Plan** – which identifies and communicates the authority's vision of its purpose and intended outcomes for citizens and service users. This is supported by an action plan that is updated annually.
- **The Strategic Risk Register** – which reflects the objectives of the strategic plan and identifies the implications for the Council's governance arrangements.
- **The Constitution** - This is the fundamental basis of the authority's governance arrangements and includes:
 - Defining and documenting the roles and responsibilities of the executive, nonexecutive, scrutiny and officer functions, with clear delegation arrangements and protocols for effective communication.
 - Reviewing and updating standing orders, standing financial instructions, a scheme of delegation and supporting procedure notes / manuals, which clearly define how decisions are taken.
 - The Policy Framework which includes the documents relating to Corporate Governance including:
 - The Local Code of Corporate Governance.
 - A risk management strategy detailing processes and controls required to manage risks.
 - The Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy
 - The Ethical Framework which includes documents relating to standards of conduct and good practice which include:
 - A code of conduct which defines the standards of behaviour for all members.
 - Planning procedures Code of Practice
 - Protocol on Members/officer Relations
 - Media Protocol
 - Operational Protocol relating to Administration Arrangements
 - Monitoring Officer Protocol
 - Chief Finance Officer Protocol
 - Resources Protocol
 - A whistle blowing policy for receiving and investigating complaints from the public and staff.
 - Gifts and Hospitality Guidance
- **The Chief Finance Officer Protocol** sets out the responsibilities to conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010)
- **The operation of a Governance Committee** which undertakes the core functions of an audit committee, as identified in CIPFA's document 'Audit Committees – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities'.
- **The operation of a Scrutiny Panel** to ensure that the actions of the Cabinet accord with the policies and budget of the Council, monitor the financial performance of the Council, link spending proposals to the Council's policy priorities and review progress and to review decisions of the Cabinet via the call-in procedure.
- **A performance management system** for all officers that identifies key objectives and development needs.
- **A members training programme.**

- **A communications strategy** which establishes clear channels of communication with all sections of the community and other stakeholders, ensuring accountability and encouraging open consultation.
- **A partnership strategy** that ensures that the quality of the Council's partnerships are improved and that all partnerships, both current and proposed, add value.
- **Treasury management practices and policies**

The Strategic Finance Manager has continued to hold the post of the Section 151 Officer for Colchester Borough Council during the year. The arrangements in place ensured that Colchester Borough Council's financial management arrangements conformed with the governance requirements of the CIPFA statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010).

DELIVERING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Review of effectiveness

Colchester 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 managers within the authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Internal Audit annual report, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates including the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate, Equal Opportunities Commission, Lexcel, Investors In People, the Vehicle Inspectorate, DEFRA, East England Tourist Board, the Office of Surveillance Commissioners and the Local Government Ombudsman.

As well as the annual review, the governance and control frameworks are maintained and reviewed by a series of comprehensive processes throughout the year. These include:

- **A robust Internal Audit function** where the planned work is based on identified key systems and risk areas
- **An embedded reporting system** for both internal and external audit issues that ensures that senior managers and members are fully briefed on key issues, which includes regular reporting to the Finance and Audit Scrutiny Panel.
- **A comprehensive risk management process** that ensures the key risks across the authority, both operational and strategic, are captured and reported to senior officers and members.
- **The reports of the Chief Financial Officer** to members and the senior management team including financial assessments of key projects and decisions.
- **Reporting of key performance issues** to the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel.
- **A comprehensive budget monitoring process** that is reported monthly to senior managers.
- **A partnership register** that records the details of all of the partnerships that the Council is involved in.

The significant control issues found during the course of the review are highlighted in the table at the end of the statement.

Effectiveness of Other Organisations

The Council owns two companies, Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) which was created in 2003 and Colchester Community Stadium Limited (CCSL) that was created in 2007. As these are limited companies there is no requirement for them to produce Governance Statements in this format. However it is recognised by the Council that it is essential for these companies to operate effective governance procedures to ensure appropriate and cost effective service provision and protection of Council assets.

Whilst CBH is an 'arms length' company it is still necessary for the Council to ensure that it operates effectively to ensure that it provides an effective and economical service to housing tenants and that the Council's asset, the housing stock, is adequately protected. CBH have produced their own Annual Governance Statement that has been shared with the Council. There were no significant control weakness identified during the year that are required to be included in this statement.

A review of the management arrangements for CCSL was carried out as part of the preparation of this statement. Whilst CCSL is an 'arms length' company it is still necessary for the Council to ensure that it operates effectively to ensure that it can make the necessary loan repayments to the Council and that the Council's asset, the stadium, is adequately protected. There were no significant control weakness identified during the year that are required to be included in this statement

The Council is the lead partner in a joint museum service with Ipswich Borough Council. Due to the nature of the arrangement, the joint museum service is required to produce its own annual return which includes an assessment of internal control. Therefore it is not intended to include any details relating to this service within this statement.

The North Essex Parking Partnership was created on 1 April 2011 with Colchester Borough Council as the lead partner. The partnership is required to produce its own annual return which includes an assessment of internal control. Therefore it is not intended to include any details relating to the service within this statement.

The Council has a comprehensive partnership strategy and maintains a detailed register of the partnerships that it participates in. The strategy defines what a partnership is and details the governance arrangements that should be in place for all partnerships, both present and new. It also provides a mechanism for improving the effectiveness of the partnerships.

Internal Audit Opinion

From the work undertaken in 2014/15, Internal Audit has provided satisfactory assurance that the system of internal control that has been in place at the Council for the year ended 31 March 2015 accords with proper practice. This is excepting any details of significant internal control issues as documented hereafter. It is also the opinion of Internal Audit that the Council's corporate governance framework complies with the best practice guidance on corporate governance issued by CIPFA/SOLACE.

Significant Governance Issues

The review of the effectiveness of the governance and internal control arrangements has identified some areas where actions are required to ensure that the authority continues to provide appropriate and cost effective services. The issues and action plans are shown in the table below. These will be monitored and reviewed via the Internal Audit reporting process.

No.	Issue	Action
1.	<p>Health & Safety A comprehensive review of the Council's Health & Safety framework was undertaken during the year. This highlighted some areas for focus and improvement to ensure that the Council maintains the highest possible standards in relation to the safety and wellbeing of its staff and visitors.</p>	<p>A comprehensive action plan has been drawn up to ensure that there is an ongoing programme to develop the relevant areas.</p>
2.	<p>Management of Supplier Relationships It was recognised during the review that the management of supplier relationships can be reactive, leading to impacts on the Council's business resources, especially in the event of unexpected incidents or unforeseen changes in requirements.</p>	<p>Processes to ensure proactive management of service delivery need to be embedded in the organisation. This includes providing training and guidance to officers that manage significant contracts as well as ensuring that contract documentation specifies the Council's expectations.</p>
3.	<p>Resilience Whilst work has been undertaken as part of the fundamental service reviews to create resilience in the organisation, it is recognised that there are still areas where reliance is placed on individual expert officers.</p>	<p>The resilience objectives of the FSR's need to continue to be embedded to ensure that the relevant posts are identified and processes are put in place to mitigate against the loss of key individual officers.</p>

We have been advised on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework, by the Governance Committee, and we propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Signed:

..... *Paul Smith*
Leader of the Council

..... *A.R. Pritchard*
& Chief Executive

on behalf of Colchester Borough Council

