

Manchester City Council Report for Information

Report to: Standards Committee – 19 March 2020

Subject: Draft Annual Governance Statement 2019/20

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer

Summary

This report contains the draft 2019/20 Annual Governance Statement (AGS) which has been produced following completion of the annual review of the Council's governance arrangements and systems of internal control. The processes followed to produce the AGS are outlined in the report. Related activity to promote better understanding and transparency in relation to governance arrangements, both within the Council and for the public is also described.

Recommendations

Standards Committee is requested to note and comment on the contents of the draft version of the Council's 2019/20 Annual Governance Statement (AGS).

Wards Affected: All

Contact Officers:

Name: Carol Culley
Position: Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer
Telephone: 0161 234 3406
E-mail: carol.culley@manchester.gov.uk

Name: Fiona Ledden
Position: City Solicitor
Telephone: 0161 234 3087
E-mail: fiona.ledden@manchester.gov.uk

Name: James Binks
Position: Director of Policy, Performance and Reform
Telephone: 0161 234 1146
E-mail: j.binks@manchester.gov.uk

Name: Sarah Broad
Position: Strategic Lead - Business Change
Telephone: 0161 245 7577
E-mail: sarah.broad@manchester.gov.uk

Name: Sean Pratt
Position: Directorate Lead - Corporate Planning and Governance
Telephone: 0161 234 1853
E-mail: s.pratt@manchester.gov.uk

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Local authorities have a legal responsibility to conduct, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of their governance framework including their system of internal control. Following the review an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) must be produced, approved and published.
- 1.2 Standards Committee are asked to note the findings of the 2019/20 AGS, which is attached as an appendix to this report.

2. Format and sections of the document

- 2.1 The content and style of the AGS is reviewed each year to ensure that it remains compliant with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) guidelines, and that improvements are made where possible. There is a focus in the document on effective public communication, plain and clear language, partnership working, and ensuring transparency and clarity over what the Council's governance challenges are, alongside what is being done to address them.
- 2.2 In 2016, the Council fully reviewed and updated its Code of Corporate Governance (the Code) to reflect the seven new principles detailed in CIPFA's *"Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2016)"*. Alongside the CIPFA principles, the vision and values of the organisation – the Our Manchester principles - are at the heart of the Council's approach to governance. Our Manchester was therefore also integral to the way the standards in the Code were defined when it was reviewed. The Code was subsequently updated again in 2019, to ensure that the contents remained accurate, up to date, and that they reflected all applicable relevant legislation.
- 2.3 A key element of compiling the AGS is an assessment of the extent to which the Council has adhered to the governance standards set out in its Code, and providing a robust evidence base for this, set out in a clear way. This can be seen in Section 4, The Governance Framework.
- 2.4 The AGS includes the following sections:

1 – Introduction This section provides a clear, plain language explanation for the lay reader as to what the purpose of the document is. The reader is also signposted to the Council's Annual Report as a companion document to the AGS, where the reader can access information about the Council's expenditure, policies and performance.

2 and 3 - The scope of responsibility and the purpose of the governance framework; these sections outline the legal requirements for an AGS and its links to the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

4 – The Governance Framework; this describes how the Council has complied with the principles in its Code of Corporate Governance, and

includes links to online documents where the reader can access more detailed information.

5 – Annual review of effectiveness of the governance framework; this section explains the mechanisms by which the Council assesses its governance arrangements, and what conclusions have been drawn.

6 – Progress in addressing the Council’s governance challenges; This section explains progress made in addressing challenges identified in last year’s AGS.

7 – Action Plan: Governance Challenges for 2020/21 Onwards; this section will set out the key areas which the Council will focus on in 2020/21, to address challenges identified and changing circumstances.

3. Process followed to produce the AGS 2019/20

- 3.1 A progress report was provided to Audit Committee in November 2019, updating members on the implementation of actions to improve governance arrangements identified in the Action Plan at the end of last year’s AGS. Progress since November in delivering these actions is described in section six of the new AGS.
- 3.2 Subsequently, to identify significant governance challenges to be addressed during 2020/21 a number of evidence sources were considered including;
 - Analysis of responses from Heads of Services to the online annual governance questionnaires which provide a self-assessment of compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance.
 - Significant governance challenges in Partnerships as identified by the Council’s Register of Significant Partnerships assessment process.
 - A meeting of key Senior Officers with responsibility for Governance, to identify and discuss emerging governance issues
 - Consideration of risks identified in the Corporate Risk Register
 - Emergent challenges identified by the work of Internal Audit during 2019/20
 - Where appropriate carrying forward elements of action points from 2019/20 if substantial further challenges and monitoring is required.
- 3.3 These processes, described in more detail in section 5 of the AGS itself, led to the identified governance challenges described in section seven. This sets out an Action Plan, which looks ahead to the main challenges where the Council will need to focus attention in 2020/21.

4. Communication of Governance Arrangements

- 4.1 The Council is committed to improving the transparency of its governance arrangements, and ensuring it publishes clear and concise explanations of these arrangements in a format easily accessible to the public. A number of separate steps have been taken to achieve this, which are outlined below.

- 4.2 **The Council's Code of Corporate Governance** – The Council's Code is written in plain and clear language and is easily accessible on the Council website. CIPFA has highlighted the Council's Code as an example of good practice.
- 4.3 **Accessibility of the AGS** – The AGS has been written in such a way as to make it as accessible as possible for the lay reader, for example by focusing on making the governance challenge updates as plain, clear and concise as possible. As well as being included as part of the Council's Annual Accounts, it is also easily accessible separately on the Council's website.
- 4.4 **The Annual Report** – the Council's Annual Report includes an overview of the AGS. This sets out a summary of the Council's governance standards and challenges in a concise and clear way. The publication of the last report was promoted on the Council's website and via social media, to promote public engagement with the report.

5. Next Steps and AGS Timeline

- 5.1 The following table shows the key reporting dates for the 2018/19 AGS;

Date	Milestone
19 March 2020	Draft AGS to Standards Committee
7 April 2020	Draft AGS to Audit Committee
28 May 2020	Draft AGS passed to External Audit as part of the Accounts.
28 July 2020	Final AGS and Accounts circulated to Audit

- 5.2 An early draft of the AGS must be produced before the end of the financial year, due to the Council's Accounts timeline and the Committee clearance requirements set out in the Constitution. The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 brought forward the timetable for the preparation of 2017/18 (and onwards) draft Accounts by one month, and the deadline for audit by two months. This means that to comply with the Constitution and submit a draft of the AGS to Audit and Standards Committee before it is finalised in the Accounts, it must be taken to the March and April Committee meetings, rather than June as in years prior to 2017/18. This means that there will be some subsequent revisions to the final draft AGS from the version provided with these papers, based on further progress made to address governance challenges during the remainder of this financial year.
- 5.3 Subsequent amendments will require oversight and clearance before the signed AGS is passed to external audit. To address this, a recommendation will be included in the report to Audit Committee that Committee delegate authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Committee Members, to clear the revised version as there are no further Committee meetings prior to 28 May 2020.

- 5.4 Standards Committee is requested to note and comment on the contents of the draft version of the Council's 2019/20 Annual Governance Statement (AGS). Any amendments to the statement requested by Committee will be included in the signed draft version included with the Accounts and passed to External Audit on 28 May 2020.