

Manchester City Council Report for Information

Report to: Standards Committee – 15 June 2023

Subject: Draft Annual Governance Statement 2022/23

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer

Summary

This report contains the draft 2022/23 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.

Recommendations

Standards Committee is requested to note and comment on the contents of the draft version of the Council's 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement (AGS).

Wards Affected: All

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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 2022/23 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, accessibility of the document, and ensuring transparency and clarity over what the Council's governance challenges are, alongside what is being done to address them.
- 2.2 A more concise document template for the AGS has been used since 2020/21 with the governance challenge update section containing a clearer focus on the high-level summary of the strategic oversight of improvements. Coupled with hyperlinks to the referenced documents and plans, this approach avoids the reproduction of detailed updates which are available in other existing Committee reports. This reduces duplication and delivers efficiencies in resource expended. In 2021/22 accessibility improvements were also made to the layout of the document.
- 2.3 In 2016, the Council fully reviewed and updated its Code of Corporate Governance (the Code) to reflect the seven 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. A streamlined and updated version of the Code was taken to Audit and Standards Committees in November 2022.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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.

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 – Strategic oversight of actions to address the Council's governance challenges in 2022/23; This section provides a concise high-level summary of strategic actions taken to address the Council's governance challenges for the 2022/23 financial year, as identified in the Action Plan in the previous AGS (2021/22).

7 – Action Plan: Governance Challenges for 2023/24 Onwards; this section sets out the key areas which the Council will focus on in 2023/24, to address challenges identified and changing circumstances.

3. Process followed to produce the AGS 2022/23

3.1 To identify significant governance challenges to be addressed during 2023/24 several 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 2022/23
- Where appropriate carrying forward elements of action points from 2022/23 if substantial further challenges and monitoring is required.
- Annual Report of the Standards Committee - The Council is committed to promoting the highest standards of conduct by members and has adopted a Code of Conduct for all members as part of its constitution. The Annual Report of the Standards Committee is one of the Council's sources of governance assurance.

3.2 These processes, described in more detail in Section 5 of the AGS itself, led to the identified governance challenges described in Section 7. This sets out an Action Plan, which looks ahead to the main challenges where the Council will need to focus attention in 2023/24.

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.
- 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, and providing evidence and examples for each of the governance principles. As well as being included as part of the Council's Annual Accounts, it is also easily accessible separately on the Council's website. The layout of the document follows digital accessibility best practice guidelines.

5. Next Steps and AGS Timeline

- 5.1 The next key reporting dates for the 2022/23 AGS are.
- 23 June 2023 – Draft AGS included with the Council's draft Accounts 2022/23
 - 25 July 2023 – Draft Accounts 2022/23 to Audit Committee
- 5.2 Standards Committee is requested to note and comment on the contents of the draft version of the Council's 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement (AGS). Any amendments to the statement requested by Committee will be included in the draft version included with the Accounts and passed to External Audit prior to Audit Committee on 25 July 2023.