



Annual Governance Statement 2020/21

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Governance Statement 2020/21

1. Introduction

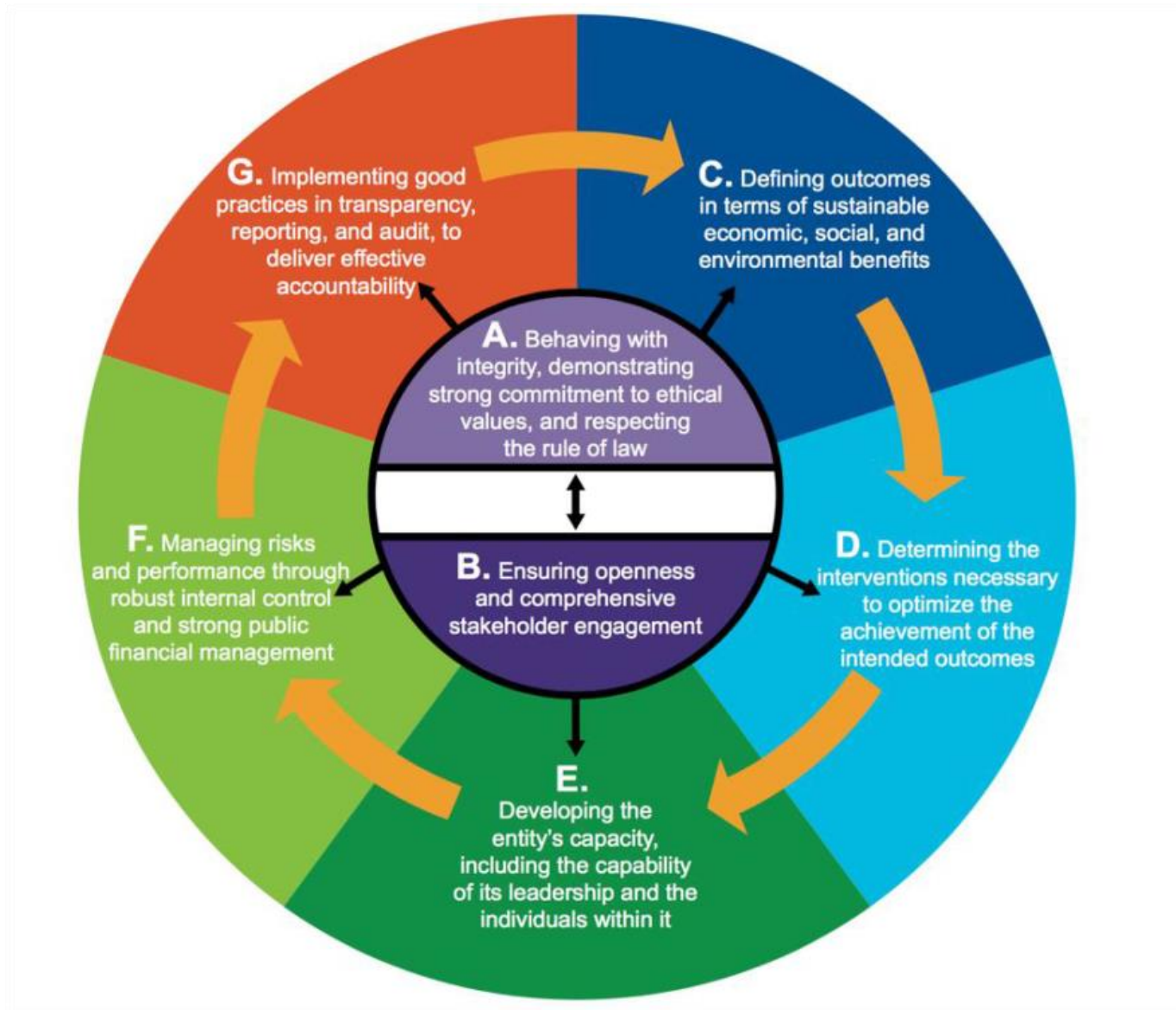
- 1.1 Each year the city council produces a governance statement that explains how it makes decisions, manages its resources and promotes values and high standards of conduct and behaviour. This statement complies with regulation 6(2) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.
- 1.2 Stoke-on-Trent city council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, that public money is safeguarded, correctly accounted for, used economically, efficiently and effectively to deliver quality services to the community it serves.
- 1.3 The city council is committed to embedding and achieving a robust set of corporate governance arrangements. The city council is managed within a robust framework as set out in the city council constitution, which clearly outlines how the city council operates, how decisions are made and what procedures need to be followed to ensure the city council is efficient, transparent and accountable to its local residents and stakeholders.
- 1.4 The Annual Governance Statement reports on:
 - i. how the city council complies with its own governance arrangements;
 - ii. how the city council monitors the effectiveness of the governance arrangements and;
 - iii. what improvements or changes in governance arrangements are proposed during the forthcoming year.
- 1.5 During March 2020, the city council activated the Emergency Plan for the City and declared a Level 3 contingency for decision making purposes in response to the Covid-19 emergency. This included detailed governance arrangements that the city council put in place in order to manage the situation. This document focuses on the governance in place during the entirety of 2020/21, the majority of which were subject to revised arrangements due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. An additional section has therefore been included in this document to reflect the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on governance (see Section 5).
- 1.6 The footnotes provided are internet links which will take you to the specific supporting documents and appropriate web pages.

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2. Scope of Responsibility

- 2.1 Stoke-on-Trent city council is responsible for ensuring that its services are provided and 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. The Local Government Act 1999 also places a duty on all councils to secure continuous improvement and to demonstrate economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 2.2 In discharging this overall responsibility, the city council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and arrangements for the management of risk.
- 2.3 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and The International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) identified seven key principles relating to governance in their document *International Framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector (CIPFA/IFAC, 2014)*. A summary of the Seven Principles of Good Governance in the public sector and how they relate to each other is shown over:

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International Framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector (CIPFA/IFAC, 2016) (the 'International Framework')

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The Purpose of the Governance Framework

- 2.4 The Governance Framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values by which Stoke-on-Trent city council is directed and controlled. This, together with its activities and leadership, enables it to monitor and manage its performance for delivering cost effective services.
- 2.5 Effective performance and risk management allows the city council to have increased confidence in achieving its objectives and also allows the citizens of Stoke-on-Trent to have increased assurance in the city council's governance arrangements and its ability to deliver.
- 2.6 The system of internal control is a significant part of the governance framework and is designed to manage risk to an acceptable level. Risk cannot be eliminated and therefore controls can only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. Internal Control is based on a process to:
- Identify and prioritise risks that prevent the achievement of the city council aims and objectives;
 - Evaluate the likelihood that risks are realised and their impact;
 - The appropriate management of those risks.
- 2.7 The city council has a number of committees that challenge and review the options considered and actions taken by the city council. The aim is to ensure that robust decisions are made that focus on achieving the best strategic outcomes for local residents within the available level of resources.
- 2.8 The city council has an Audit Committee,¹ which, has as part of its function the responsibility of considering the effectiveness of the city council's risk management arrangements, the control environment and associated anti-fraud and anti-corruption arrangements, and seek assurance that action is being taken on issues identified by auditors and inspectors. In discharging this function, the Audit Committee will ensure compliance with such codes, protocols, statements and policies as are necessary to meet its responsibilities, which includes the appropriate arrangements for the management of risk.

¹ [Audit Committee Details](#)

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3. The 2020/21 Governance Framework

- 3.1 The CIPFA/IFAC framework (Good Governance in the Public Sector), provides advice and indicators to good governance which affords the city council the opportunity to review and test its governance and structures in delivering best practice.
- 3.2 The CIPFA/IFAC framework identifies the seven core principles of good governance as:
1. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.
 2. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.
 3. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.
 4. Determining the interventions necessary to optimize the achievement of the intended outcomes.
 5. Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.
 6. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.
 7. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.
- 3.3 The governance framework covered by this statement has been in place at Stoke-on-Trent city council for the year ended 31 March 2021 and is considered up to July 2021. An assessment of the city council's governance arrangements against each core principle is attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.4 In October 2020 the City Council approved the Stronger Together Strategic Plan 2020-24 which sets out the Council's strategic priorities, as well as the objectives that it will aim to achieve over the next four years and the approaches it will take to achieve them. The over-arching vision for the Council and the wider city for 2024 will be used to shape and influence activity and service delivery, as well as the Council's interactions with partners, residents and stakeholders. City Council also approved the revised Performance Framework which sets out arrangements for corporate monitoring and reporting of performance against these objectives and priorities.
- 3.5 In November 2020, the city council began consultation on a revised senior management structure. This saw the council adopt a more traditional four directorate structure by moving all relevant corporate functions, including customer services, to a single Strategy and Resources directorate and by creating a single Place directorate incorporating Housing services. The City Director sits above all four directorates. The main benefits were creating a sensible balance of functions and spans of control, consolidating functions in a way that makes most sense in terms of inter-dependencies and alignments, creating a strong 'engine room' for the organisation, strengthening financial leadership by elevating position and status of s151 officer and generating a financial saving for the authority.
- 3.6 In December 2020 the City Council approved the Stoke-on-Trent Economic Renewal Strategic Plan 2020-2022, the strategic plan was intended to respond to the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit and it set out the priorities for the following two

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years in three phases which were referred to as ‘stabilise’, ‘re-ignite’ and ‘power up’. In early 2021 a Powering Up Stoke-on-Trent prospectus was launched for the city that focuses on four key themes, Transport, Economic Development, Education & Skills, Health & Productivity. The aim of which is to secure partnership and investment and set out how we need to work together, with our regional partners, at pace to agree with Government a single set of priority projects and interventions that are right for Stoke-on-Trent. The core purpose of this joint endeavour would be to drive economic development by fostering high growth sectors, creating the high skilled well-paid jobs our city needs.

- 3.7 The city council acknowledges the continuing governance challenges presented through reduced funding and increasing demand for services, with Children and Family Services continuing to face unprecedented pressures, some of which have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. To meet these pressures, the council’s budget strategy has been designed to support a transformation of services. There is a need to radically reshape services to achieve higher quality, deliver greater value for money and become more responsive. This includes recognising changes in how residents access services, which have accelerated during the coronavirus pandemic, and which will enable the council to better understand the changing needs and priorities of the city’s communities. By 2024 the council will be a truly flexible, seven-day council, using advances in digital service delivery and the best customer care to meet the needs of the city’s residents and businesses. The council’s operating plan sets out an allocation of resources in line with the budget, to identify key performance measures, efficiency and productivity requirements, as well as key risks and mitigations and details of key enablers to continually improve our services. The city council has introduced the Stoke-on-Trent City Forum, a partnership that will drive forward plans for the city and deliver the ambitions set out in the Powering Up Stoke-on-Trent Prospectus.
- 3.8 From March 2020, the city council activated the Emergency Plan for the City and declared a Level 3 contingency for decision making purposes in response to the COVID-19 emergency. Details of the governance arrangements that the city council put into place to respond to this are included in section 5 of this document.

4. Review of Effectiveness

- 4.1 A review of the city council’s governance arrangements draws on several sources including:
- Service updates from individual service managers
 - Reviews of partnership governance arrangements
 - External inspections by government agencies
 - Internal Audit reviews which consider and report upon compliance with corporate policies and procedures
 - External audit reports
- 4.2 The Audit Committee plays a key role in the city council’s review of the effectiveness of its governance framework. It seeks assurance on the adequacy of the city council’s risk management, control and governance arrangements.

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- 4.3 The Audit Committee completes a self-assessment against updated CIPFA guidance. The previous self-assessment was undertaken in 2018 and due to changes in the make-up of the Committee following local elections in May 2019 plans were established to undertake a revised self-assessment and a knowledge and skills assessment to support a training plan for the Committee. This was originally planned for March 2020 but has been postponed due to the Covid-19 emergency situation, it is planned that a self-assessment will be undertaken in 2021.

Internal Audit and Review

- 4.4 The city council has a strong Internal Audit function and a positive working relationship with External Audit. The arrangements for the provision of Internal Audit are contained within the city council's Financial Regulations which are included within the Constitution. The Director of Strategy & Resources, as Section 151 Officer is responsible for ensuring that there is an adequate and effective system of Internal Audit of the city council's accounting and other systems of internal control, as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.
- 4.5 In 2017 CIPFA published revised Public Sector Internal Audit Standards to promote further improvement in the professionalism, quality, consistency and effectiveness of internal audit across the public sector. The city council has adopted these standards and Internal Audit has carried out self-assessments with areas for improvement being addressed. An external review was undertaken in February 2018. This gave the city council's internal audit service the highest category of "Generally Conforms" to the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and those of the Local Government Application Note. An action plan was produced to implement the three recommendations and ten suggestions from the review, all of which have now been implemented.
- 4.6 Internal Audit's Annual Plan is prioritised by a combination of key and statutory systems' assessments and reviews on the basis of risk, and the city council's corporate governance arrangements. The work incorporates reviews of the main financial systems, other systems identified as high risk, grant certification work and the continued development of proactive fraud work. The resulting work plan is discussed and agreed with Directors, the Audit Committee and shared with the city council's external auditor. All planned audit reports include an assessment of the adequacy of internal control and a prioritised action plan to address any areas needing improvement where for example, controls need to be improved or the overall control environment strengthened. These are provided to Directors, and other officers as appropriate, and a summary is provided to Members on a quarterly basis.
- 4.7 The Internal Audit review of the city council's control environment is set out in the annual report to Audit Committee which concluded that from the work carried out during 2020/21, the level of assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of the city council's control environment is Satisfactory. This includes an assessment of the level of assurance the City Council's governance arrangements can provide. A number of governance audits were completed or in progress in 2020/21 including contract letting, business continuity, contract management and budget management.

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- 4.8 Whilst a satisfactory opinion on the control environment as a whole is positive, individual audit reviews have highlighted a number of opportunities to improve control further which are to be addressed through the implementation of internal audit recommendations. In addition, the council plans to undertake a full review of control process during 2021/22 to ensure consistent and regulatory controls are applied at all levels. This work will provide additional capacity to strengthen the council's control environment.

External Audit and Review

- 4.8 Ernst & Young LLP have been appointed by the Public Sector Auditor Appointments (PSAA²) as the city council's external auditor from 2018/19 for a five year period. Their annual work programme is set in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice issued by the National Audit Office and includes nationally prescribed and locally determined activities. During 2020/21 the scope of that work was to support a conclusion on the city council's financial statements, its Whole of Government Accounts return and Value for Money assessment; this assessment asks whether in all significant respects, the city council had proper arrangements to ensure it took properly informed decisions and deployed resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people. City council officers work closely with external audit to provide information and assurance in support of those conclusions and acts on any recommendations made as a result.
- 4.9 The city council received a qualified Value for Money (VFM) conclusion for 2019/20 due to the issues identified within Children's Services and the court of protection administration, all other services were viewed as having the proper arrangements in place. The issues within Children's Services and the Court of Protection administration identified weaknesses in proper arrangements for understanding and using appropriate and reliable performance information to support informed decision making and performance management, and managing risks effectively and maintaining a sound system of internal control. The city council has received an unqualified opinion on the financial statements for 2019/20 and the previous three years. The city council noted the recommendations resulting from the report and took steps to make further improvements. The accounts for 2020/21 onwards are pending final sign off by our external auditors.

External Inspections

- 4.10 The city council is subject to a number of inspections by regulatory bodies on many of the services that it provides. During 2020/21 the number of external reviews completed was reduced due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. However, some reviews were undertaken and progress continues to be made as the result of previous inspections.
- 4.11 Two external inspections were undertaken in the Employment, Learning & Skills area. The first was a stocktake visit by the Further Education Commissioners Office (DFE) and the second was an OFSTED progress monitoring visit in January 2021. Both inspections

² PSAA website provides information regarding the National Audit Office Code of Practice in relation to audits of local authorities

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were very positive. The FE Stocktake found that the authority “is now developing clear accountability measures and processes that will ensure that managers and all staff are held to account for the performance of students and the quality of provision. All the recommendations resulting from the FEC intervention assessment are ongoing and there has been much improvement since the first FEC team visited over a year ago after their Inadequate inspection outcome”. However, partly due to the impact of Covid, “the impact on students of the changes that have been made to the ELS service, their outcomes and destinations, is not yet measurable. Essentially, there have been many significant changes that have touched every part of the service and these need to be embedded fully”.

- 4.12 The OFSTED progress monitoring visit confirmed that there had been reasonable progress since the previous inspection and that “leaders now focus sharply on actions to improve the quality of education”. Governance structures are well established and ensure that the curriculum offer meets the skills needs of the City. Teaching and learning have improved so that learners are “helped to consolidate and build on their knowledge”. Further actions are needed to ensure:
- they have sufficiently helpful information so that they can evaluate accurately learners’ progress from their respective starting points, and identify swiftly where learners do not achieve their best
 - teachers develop the knowledge and skills required to plan teaching to help learners understand and secure new knowledge in their long-term memory consistently well
 - all learners can access the appropriate technology to participate fully in their learning.
- 4.13 In February 2019, OFSTED undertook an inspection of children’s social care services. The review looked at the impact of leaders on social work practice; the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection; and children in care and care leavers. The results of the review were an overall effectiveness score of inadequate. The DfE issued a revised direction in March 2020 requiring the council to enter into a formal partnership with Leeds City Council, continue to co-operate with the Children’s Services Commissioner and accept support provided by Partners in Practice. Since the inspection the city council has undertaken significant work to address this by implementing the Improvement Plan, which is overseen by the DfE appointed Children’s Commissioner Eleanor Brazil (who was replaced by Paul Moffat in July 2021) and monitored by the multi-agency Children’s Improvement Board on a monthly basis, chaired by the Commissioner. The Improvement Plan has been reviewed and we have now entered the second stage of this plan following review of phase 1.
- 4.14 Leeds City Council have been commissioned to remain the city council’s Improvement Partner for a further year until March 2022. During 2021 both Stockport and North Yorkshire Councils will also be providing some specific support as Partners in Practice, concentrating on the areas of children with disabilities and case work with families where domestic abuse is a risk factor. In the last financial year external scrutiny has been provided via an Ofsted Focussed Visit in September 2020, our Ofsted Annual Conversation on 12th May 2021, and our third Ofsted Monitoring Visit on 20th April 2021 which had a focus on cared for children (children looked after by the Local Authority).

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- 4.15 In addition the DfE hold quarterly reviews with the city council attended by senior officers and members, Leeds as our Improvement Partner and the Children's Commissioner. Three further Monitoring Visits are planned at quarterly intervals prior to our next full Children's Social Care Inspection due in spring 2022. All external scrutiny over the past 12 months has noted a slow but definitive trajectory of improvement. The Focussed Visit cited continuing serious weaknesses in practice and significant staffing challenges with a high number and ratio of agency staff but that a new group of senior managers were in place and beginning to make progress. Significantly it was observed that the extent of poor practice on children had been recognised and understood. The building blocks for improvement were seen to be being established with improved quality assurance. The Local Authority was noted to have responded positively to the challenges of coronavirus. Areas for improvement were;
- The quality and monitoring of CiN and CP Plans.
 - The speed and progress of children in care towards permanent solutions for their long-term living arrangements.
 - A sufficiency of placements where brothers and sisters can live together.
 - The recording of management oversight, case directions and supervision.
 - Consistency of thresholds in relation to the provision of early help to families.
 - The quality of Personal Education Plans for Children.
- 4.16 The Ofsted Monitoring Visit on 20th April 2021, which reviewed progress in relation to cared for children and the effectiveness of practice and planning for them noted that the senior leadership team, had a growing and more focussed understanding of frontline practice informed by audit and accurate performance data and an impactful evaluation programme. The impact of senior leaders was cited as having an impact on day to day practice and newly instigated Panels were effective, although numbers of cared for children are at their highest rate and staff instability remains a concern. Staff felt positive, well supported and listened to and provided positive feedback about training and development. Social work practice has improved. Most decisions were judged to be timely and well judged. All children were found to be living in safe placements and having their needs met. Inspectors felt that children's wishes are carefully considered, social workers know their children well with excellent examples of 'voice of the child' observed. Health needs of the children were also noted to be routinely met and their educational attendance understood. Case records were recently more detailed. Supervision is generally monthly, considers voice of child, family history, provides analytical decision making and provides a clear rationale for decisions made about children.
- 4.17 Areas for remaining improvement were addressing legacy drift which result in delays in children achieving permanence, ensuring changes become embedded and audit quality improves to accurately assess the quality and impact of practice. Reducing agency staff and stabilising the workload of social workers remains a priority which could undermine continued improvement is not addressed and the quality of all work and specifically Personal Education Plans requires more improvement. The impact of the Independent Reviewing Officers also requires strengthening and a priority to be given to completing Life Story Work with all children who need this. The City Council has also now established its own Safeguarding Partnership with an Independent Scrutineer as Chair, following previous arrangements in partnership with Staffordshire County Council.

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- 4.18 Recommendations from the latest 2020 Housing Health Check have informed the refresh of the Housing Plan for Excellence, with a particular focus around reviewing our resident involvement structures, leading to the development of a draft Housing Customer Engagement Strategy to be consulted on in the summer 2021. There are no further independent housing health checks planned, with the focus being on continued quality assurance through the embedded housing performance framework to ensure the HRA continues to operate to standards assured by these previous external inspections, until the proposed proactive regulatory regime within the Social Housing White Paper is implemented; this proposal will remove the serious detriment test and introduce routine inspections for the largest landlords (over 1,000 homes) every four years, supported by a review of the Consumer Standards.
- 4.19 The outcome of the city council's assessment of its governance arrangements in 2020/21 is summarised below. A more detailed assessment against the seven CIPFA/IFAC principles is set out in **Appendix 1**.

5. Response to Covid-19 Emergency

- 5.1 From March 2020, the city council activated the Emergency Plan for the City and declared a Level 3 contingency for decision making purposes in response to the covid-19 emergency. This included detailed governance arrangements that the city council put in place in order to manage the situation. An internal Gold Strategic Command Group was established to set the city council's strategy with regard to the incident, manage the overall budget and undertake decision making at the strategic level, supporting the City Directors and Directors who took decisions under the emergency plan delegated powers or the scheme of delegation as appropriate. Meetings were held daily initially and when lockdown statuses changed and then moved to weekly and are now operating on 'as required' basis as part of the overall Senior Management Team arrangements as we transition out of recovery. In addition, a Tactical Co-ordinating Group Internal (Silver) was established to coordinate activities and move forward with tasks delegated by Gold and has had a similar meeting pattern. Changes were agreed to the city council's constitution at a city council meeting on 26th March 2020 to ensure that effective decision making could continue during the emergency situation. A detailed schedule of all changes to legislation has been maintained setting out the impact for the city council. Virtual meetings have taken place which the Monitoring Officer has ensured these have been conducted in accordance with the legislative framework. In terms of the Recovery phase, there have been three key strands of work which have been co-ordinated by the Recovery Co-ordination Group meeting regularly and chaired by the Leader of the Council. From a governance perspective in accordance with the constitution the Council has maintained a level 3 decision making contingency, that is Council, Cabinet and Regulatory meetings have continued virtually. Initially (with the exception of Children's Overview and Scrutiny which continued throughout) Overview and scrutiny initially during the lockdown only met for Pre-decision scrutiny and call-in. Since that time all Overview and Scrutiny Committees have reviewed and developed their work programmes and have been meetings from late summer, albeit with reduced officer capacity to support due to Covid-19. With the end of legislation enabling virtual meetings the council has reverted to level 3 decision making and making use of increased delegation as per government guidance.
- 5.2 The emergency situation has had an impact on a number of city council services. During March and April 2020 (and again in November) the city council closed facilities including leisure centres, park cafes, markets, multi storey car parks, local centres and some office buildings. Schools also closed for all children in March and April 2020 except those of key workers and those children

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considered vulnerable. These services have gradually re-opened and been reintroduced under the leadership of the Council's Recovery Co-ordination Group.

5.3 The city council has taken a number of steps to respond to the emergency including:

- Redeploying a number of staff from closed facilities to support the frontline. For example, following the closure of leisure centres, a large number of staff were retrained and redeployed to other frontline critical services including waste collection. Alongside this, a number of staff were also retrained in safe handling of people, adult safe guarding, infection control and safe administration of medication.
- Undertaking much work to maintain supplies of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). All stocks are held in one place to control the stock levels and the distribution. Stock has been obtained from many different sources and the city council has a good supply of all items at current levels of usage.
- Production of specific risk registers with associated guidance to monitor and manage the impact of Covid-19 on key vulnerable groups.
- Launched the Stoke-on-Trent Together campaign, run by the city council in partnership with the voluntary sector organisation VAST, was set up to support those who were self-isolating and did not have the support of family or friends to call upon. City council staff from libraries supported the helpline to match those in need with those who can offer support. Almost 300 people across the city volunteered to support the campaign.
- The city council in partnership with the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce issued an economic impact survey to understand how covid-19 is impacting upon businesses across Stoke-on Trent and Staffordshire. The data collected will also be shared with the government in order to inform and support any further interventions as we move forward to the economic recovery stage.
- The city council has taken swift action to administer business support grants to assist businesses across Stoke-on-Trent affected by the pandemic.

5.4 During the emergency the city council has taken a number of steps to ensure that all key stakeholders have been kept informed. This has included:

- Coronavirus information on the city council's website
- Business Support during Coronavirus on the city council's website
- Daily updates to staff from the City Director and video messages from the City Director and Council Leader
- A health and well-being pack has been sent out to all city council staff
- Covid-19 updates from city director at a number of virtual Cabinet meetings
- Facebook live sessions

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- 5.5 The government has announced a number of allocations of funding to local authorities in relation to coronavirus. The council has received a total of £25.4 million COVID-19 Emergency Funding which has been targeted towards increasing support for the adult social care workforce and services helping the most vulnerable, including homelessness. Other specific funding has been received including areas such as infection control, test & trace, next steps accommodation programme, contain outbreak fund, and community testing. Further funding has been received to support the city's residents and businesses including a council tax hardship fund, emergency assistance for food and essential supplies, business rates relief, and business support grants. To date, £78.9 million has been distributed to businesses in the city. The financial impact of COVID-19 is being felt across all city council services due to both an increase in demand for services and a reduction in income generation, with the council continuing to undertake further work to understand the longer term financial implications.
- 5.6 A Recovery Co-ordinating Group (RCG) has been established to lead the recovery of Stoke-on-Trent following Covid-19. A framework was developed to set out the governance arrangements and identifies the recovery work streams. A key focus was on ensuring that the partnership ethos, community spirit, philanthropic efforts, volunteering and organisational changes form a positive and enduring legacy. Sub groups were also in place as follows:
- Business and Economic - together with the business community of Stoke-on-Trent to assess the economic implications for the City, ensure the area is "open for business" as soon as is practical and enable businesses affected by the emergency to resume trading as soon as possible, providing assistance where possible/appropriate
 - Wellbeing, Care and Communities - together with partners, to enable individuals and communities to recover from the impact of the crisis. To coordinate the provision of support and practical assistance to those directly or indirectly affected by the emergency and bring together the relevant care, welfare and health expertise in a coordinated way.
 - Council Operational - to manage the re-opening of council services and to ensure all council services are aligned to the recovery objectives. To make adaptations to delivery of council services to reflect changed citizen needs and expectations, changed resource context, new workforce skills and expectations, and enduring limitations from the ongoing response.

A Local Outbreak Control Board was also established, chaired by the Council Leader. The board had democratic oversight of the Local Outbreak Plan and the management of incidents and to lead communication with the public.

- 5.7 Internal Audit are undertaking a review of the adequacy of governance arrangements during this emergency period which will inform future emergency planning arrangements.

6. Framework – key improvement areas

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6.1 The following paragraphs detail key elements of the framework which have undergone significant improvements and further developments are planned over the coming year.

Operating Framework

6.2 In October 2020 Cabinet approved the Operating Plan for the 2020/21 Financial year, the Operating Plan is part of the Operational Framework to ensure that all elements of the organisation are able to work more closely together to deliver the Stronger Together Strategic Plan, strengthen partnership working and improve outcomes for our residents. This provides a clear golden thread from the vision and priorities through to team and individual plans. The Operating Plan translates the Stronger Together vision into a set of key requirements that should be met in order to ensure delivery of the priorities and objectives.

6.3 These requirements include;

- A concerted, whole-council endeavour to transform outcomes for children and young people.
- Strengthening financial performance through improved financial control and greater commercial innovation.
- A relentless drive to support the delivery of economic growth and opportunity by maximising the use of our assets, powers and resources.
- Stewardship of the development of greater civic pride in terms of the way the city is cared for and promoted.
- Using our influence and resources to make the council an effective enabler of strong families and communities in order to help the people of Stoke-on-Trent to realise their ambitions.

6.4 The finalisation of the plan was delayed due to the pandemic with content largely covering activity for the second half of the year, the pandemic has had a serious impact on the council's financial plans which will have to be revisited as a result. We have also had to reshape our priorities to reflect the ongoing demands of the outbreak and the limited availability of scarce resources. Throughout the plan there are references to the challenges of both the response and recovery phases and our solutions to those, as well as making progress against the Stronger Together objectives. It also details the opportunity to 'build back better' and embrace new ways of working to provide more efficient and effective delivery of some services.

6.5 During 2021/22 the council is developing a suite of strategies designed to support delivery of the Stronger Together vision. The Customer Service Strategy, the Digital Strategy, the Workforce and Organisational Development Strategy and the Asset Management Strategy will be supported by prioritised action plans to enhance the services we provide to our customers and residents, making best use of our financial, human and physical resources. Delivered through the transformation programme these strategies will focus heavily on the digital agenda to ensure the council is a modern, innovative, efficient and effective organisation and will feed into the Medium Term Financial Plan as savings and benefits are identified and realised.

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Team Plans

- 6.6 In August 2020 team plans were finalised (delayed due to the pandemic) that focused on continuous improvement and driving efficiency. The Team Plans are designed to encourage managers and teams to consider how they contribute to Stronger Together, and where there may be scope to work differently in future to help strengthen collaboration and partnership working to improve outcomes for our residents. Team Plans are a critically important element of the new operating framework. They underpin and inform the Thematic Plans and reinforce the 'golden thread' linking priorities and outcomes in the Strategic Vision with all levels of business planning across the organisation. The process for developing team plans for the 2021/22 Financial Year started early in the new calendar year with the additional ask for every team to detail how they will support the council's priority in respect of children and young people with all teams doing something really purposeful for our looked after children and care leavers.

Strategic Measures

- 6.7 In July 2020 Cabinet approved a refresh of the strategic measures to ensure that they remained relevant and current, the number of measures to be monitored was increased to c.80 and the refresh included the measures being split to show those that related to population outcomes and those that are process measures. Performance of the strategic measures continues to be reported to Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny Committees on a quarterly basis.

Analytics

- 6.8 In order to achieve the strategic objective of improving the use of data in decision making and service improvement to improve outcomes for residents it is necessary to commit to developing analytics within the council. This involves the creation of an engine room and business intelligence system to best support operational planning. This will provide:
- Real time insights – to understand the impact of our actions
 - Predictive analytics - to plan well for the future
 - Self-service - drillable management dashboards
 - Efficient reporting - saving officer & member time/£, paperless/light reporting
 - Integrated reporting - triangulation of data across multiple systems to identify synergies
 - Deep dive analysis - focus on deep dive cross functional analysis

The rollout of Power Bi is in train with the development of a number of initial Use Case reports across a range of service areas, this is fundamental to driving more insight from our valuable data.

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Financial Resilience

- 6.9 Despite the financial challenges faced, risks in the main continue to be managed and plans will continue to be monitored to ensure the impact on future years are minimised. The financial impact of the coronavirus pandemic will continue into 2021/22 with pressures being felt in all services. In addition to the direct and indirect impact of COVID-19 it should be noted that Children and Families Services continue to face unprecedented pressures, some of which have been exacerbated by the current pandemic. Work in relation to the Children's Improvement Plan, managing demand and an ongoing review of commissioning in placements is expected to deliver sustainable savings over the medium term. The journey of improvement for children's services continues and the council has received recognition of the progress made from the Department for Education and the Children's Commissioner.
- 6.10 During 2020/21 the government provided a number of COVID grants to assist the city council throughout the pandemic. This has enabled the city council to identify COVID expenditure against these grants. Through ensuring COVID expenditure has been fully identified against specific grants, it has given the city council a greater flexibility for the future. This successful approach to future challenges, along with strict budget management has enabled transfers to earmarked reserves to cover future risks resulting from uncertainty of covid pressures (£6.2m), including those previously identified within the budget strategy, as well as a transformation reserve to support additional investments identified in the transformation programme (£4.7m), and a strategic risk reserve at an appropriate level following sensitivity analysis (£5.4m). Planned positive management action has enabled these new earmarked reserves to be created to manage ongoing Covid uncertainty, strategic risks, and investment in transformation.
- 6.11 In light of the financial challenges faced by the authority, the city council has an on-going action plan to strengthen financial control and budget management across the authority. A new framework has been established as follows, which feeds into Cabinet:
- Financial Review Group (FRG) – this monitor, manages and challenges the use of resources and financial performance across the city council. Additional emphasis is being put on embedding a culture of personal responsibility and accountability, performance management and continuous improvement of services through the operational framework. A new training strategy covering finance related skills will be delivered and administered through workforce development, with budget holder training having already been delivered to Children's & Families and others directorates programmed before September 2021.
 - Transformation Board – The revised transformation programme seeks to embed a culture of continuous change as business as usual and to move towards the city council becoming a learning organisation. A programme of development is underway which has been corporately prioritised in line with Stronger Together objectives. The post COVID recovery work is feeding into the programme, assessing how this period has changed service delivery and how elements of this could be retained when the city council returns to business as usual, for example, agile working and channel shift.
 - Commissioning and Contract Management Board - looking at commissioning arrangements across the authority and particularly on children's and adults' placements.

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- Establishment Board - to respond to the human resources elements associated with the delivery and financial challenges faced by the city council and to support delivery of an increasingly effective and productive workforce. This will include monitoring of changes to establishment and agency, consultants and interim staff (through a dedicated sub group).
- Portfolio Management – to ensure that the city council’s portfolio of significant programmes and projects have been properly tested through a gateway process in terms of deliverability, affordability and VFM and are aligned to strategic objectives and are delivered on time, to quality and to budget.

In order to strengthen controls a financial processes workplan is underway which includes a finance training programme, procure to pay review, policies and procedures hub and grants process review.

- 6.12 In the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) presented to the city council in February 2021, it was assumed that the council would work towards increasing the General fund un-earmarked reserve to improve financial resilience, aiming to hold a minimum balance of circa 5% of the net budget. The General Reserve was increased to £11.0 million at the end of 2020/21 as planned and is expected to be maintained at that level in 2021/22.
- 6.13 The impact of COVID-19 on local authorities is unprecedented, with the impact being felt across all council services due to both an increase in demand and a reduction in income generation. Local authorities’ finances will remain significantly impacted for some time, with income affected by reductions in council tax and business rates, and by reduced sales, fees and charges due to social distancing guidelines. The city council, as part of its recovery planning, has been reflecting on the lessons learned from the pandemic, learning from the challenges, and taking the opportunity to ‘Build Back Better’. The city council’s ‘Powering Up Stoke’ campaign is an integral part of the recovery plan and has been developed to support the recovery of the local economy.

Financial Management Code

- 6.14 In support of strengthening the financial framework, CIPFA has developed the Financial Management Code (FM Code), which sets out the principles by which authorities should be guided in managing their finances and the specific standards that they should, as a minimum, seek to achieve. The FM Code standards covers areas including responsibilities of the CFO / leadership team, governance and financial management, Medium Term Financial Plan and financial resilience assessments, the annual budgeting process and monitoring of financial performance.
- 6.15 The FM Code is designed to be flexible to the nature, needs and circumstances of individual authorities. It is up to each authority to determine the extent to which it complies with the FM Code and to identify what action it may wish to take to better meet the standards that the FM Code sets out. An initial assessment has been carried out and the city council is working towards full compliance with the code during 2021/22. The initial findings indicate that the council are already compliant against many of the FM standards. The main gaps relate to FM standard G / H, in relation to longer term planning and modelling, both of which are planned to be developed.

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Governance Improvements

- 6.16 The governance framework is under continuous review and this will continue in to the next year, unfortunately there have been delays to some initiatives due to the Covid-19 emergency. The Monitoring Officer remains a member of SMT, corporate groups and is fully involved in the breadth of city council activity and decision making. A full constitutional review is in progress and changes have already been made to the next elements of review focus on scheme of delegation, petitions, contract procedure rules, financial procedure rules and honorary freeman process. Further detailed changes will be considered in July 2020. At October city council constitutional amendments were agreed that rationalised the local choice functions, removing the remaining 'general' functions from Licensing and General Purposes Committee, removing the tenancy appeals subcommittee, clarifying the role of HR Committee in restructures, clarifying the role of the Leader with regard to redundancies and improving the petitions process. Additionally, outside body appointments were re-evaluated in terms of which are Executive and Non-Executive functions in the context of the Local Government Act 200 and The Local authorities (Function and Responsibility) Regulations 2000.
- 6.17 Information Governance has been transferred to the Council's Assistant Director Governance and Registration and Monitoring Officer. The Information Governance Group continued to develop chaired by the SIRO, Vice-chaired by the Strategic Manager for Information Security and Caldicott Guardian and including the Council's Data Protection Officer and representatives from legal, communications, IT, Information Rights, Learning and Development and each department. The group has also taken in responsibility for surveillance and RIPA. The group is proving effective in raising the profile of Information Governance and implementing the Information Governance action plan with each directorate now having its own group.
- 6.18 Work continues on the relaunch of officer and member declaration of interests. Guidance was provided to elected members on ensuring they have the ability to declare an interest at a meeting where they are not a member of the committee but in attendance. Similarly work has been undertaken to review the arrangements with regard to city council owned/influenced entities to ensure that the appropriate ethical walls are observed, which is covered elsewhere in this report.
- 6.19 Work is also continuing in streamlining the decision making system in particular background papers and chief officer decisions and the scheme of delegation. A new standardised scheme of sub-delegation has been prepared for Chief Officers was launched in May 2020.
- 6.20 The city council currently has a number of entities in which it has an interest either as an owner, shareholder or as a member. These include Fortior Homes Ltd; Uitas Stoke-on-Trent Ltd; Stoke-on-Trent Regeneration Ltd; Stoke Energy Co Ltd and Stoke DEPO Ltd. These entities play an important role for the city council in not only providing financial return and delivering services, but also in terms

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of delivering city council objectives and as users of city council supplied services. The city council wants these ventures to be successful, however, they do come with a degree of risk. The city council needs to ensure it has robust processes and arrangements in place to protect its interests and to ensure that, as shareholder and lender, the city council can be assured the companies are effectively managed. Local Partnerships were commissioned to carry out a short independent review of city council owned / influenced entities and the city council's arrangements with regard to them. The review made a number of recommendations to the city council and an action plan has been developed to address these recommendations. In summary, the action plan includes:

- A single corporate shareholder group for all city council owned/ influenced entities, responsible for protecting the city council's interest, liaising with the city council owned/ influenced entities and providing consent via the shareholder representative as required.
- A commercial board, as a mechanism to review the implementation of the city council's commercial approach including the entities it influences and owns.
- The establishment of a client/customer role for each entity.
- A change of reporting line for the Managing Director of Unitas to the Unitas Board.
- Implementation of a conflicts ring-fencing procedure.
- A review of the city council nominations to boards, beginning with changes to the Councillor representation which is dealt with in this report and a request to the Unitas Board to amend its board composition accordingly.
- A review of board compositions, skills gap analysis, training and creation of role profiles.
- Review of the objectives of city council owned/influenced entities, other than Fortior which has already been clarified.
- Adoption of a unified risk based approach with regard to city council owned/ influenced entities.
- A review of the tax arrangements by an independent tax expert to ensure compliance and efficiency of all entities where the city council has an interest.

6.21 The council is in the process of establishing a Commissioning and Contracts Board that will ensure a more streamlined commissioning process, more effective market management and more robust, innovative procurement. As part of this work, the council needs to keep under review and manage ongoing risks with respect to the Community Energy Scheme, with particular reference to the contingent risk of not being able to fulfil the full terms of the original agreement, in part due to the impact of the pandemic.

6.22 A Progress & Assurance System for Children's Services including programme management approach has been adopted providing for detailed senior management line of sight and timely oversight of the large range of action plans which support the overarching Improvement Plan. Supporting this process, an integrated performance dashboard has been developed and is reported on monthly. A range of Panels are in place which are Chaired by the Assistant Director for Early Help and Children's Social Care and Strategic Lead for Corporate Parenting which consider voluntary entry to care arrangements under s20 of the Children Act 19189, permanence planning for children, external residential placements and placements which require funding support from the CCG. All risk

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assessments and team plans are fully up to date. Compliance with statutory guidance for CSC working in covid19 has been provided for via regularly updated internal procedures, communications to staff and a regular management oversight and monitoring group also chaired by the Assistant Director of Early Intervention and Children's Social Care.

Community Safety

- 6.23 The Community Safety Strategy has been reviewed and refreshed and has identified the following five partnership priorities for the city:
1. Tackling crimes which have the most impact on our communities – including Anti-Social Behaviour, Criminal Damage, Drug Supply and Public Space Violence
 2. Preventing Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults from being exploited, by addressing Serious Violence and Modern Slavery
 3. Keeping people safe in their own homes by tackling Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse
 4. Reducing repeat and persistent offending
 5. Building community resilience through place-based problem solving
- 6.24 A supporting delivery plan with identified thematic leads and performance framework is in place, with updates to the Community Safety Partnership Board scheduled for each priority. Strategic and operational partnership arrangements have continued to develop and improve. Community Safety staff now attend daily briefings with police colleagues, and weekly and monthly tasking meetings with a wide range of partners and other stakeholders. This enables speedier identification of issues, decision making and resource allocation facilitating diversion into support or enforcement action where appropriate.
- 6.25 Situational crime and ASB prevention initiatives have been delivered in the Fenton and Northwood areas of the city via the Home Office Safer Streets Fund, with further bids now submitted to support similar programmes of work in Hanley City Centre and Tunstall areas of the city. The city has again seen reductions in crime and ASB over the last twelve months, with crime down by 18% or 5,014 crimes and ASB down by 17% or 2,062 incidents. This builds on reductions achieved over the previous two years with crime now down 33% and ASB down by 28% since December 2018. Our position against our most similar group of authorities also continues to improve: from 9th out of 15 in December 2017, to 5th best in December 2020 in relation to total recorded crime, and from 11th out of 15 in December 2017, to 6th best in relation to violent crime.

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7. Significant Governance Issues

7.1 In 2020/21 no further significant governance issues were identified other than those included in this statement. All findings of regulatory inspections received during the period covered by this statement are being addressed and progress will be reported at regular intervals through the appropriate committee.

8. Declaration by City Council

8.1 We have been advised on the results of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by the Audit Committee. The city council continues to develop plans to ensure continuous improvement of the arrangements are in place and these will continue to be enhanced.

8.2 Over the coming year, we will continue to strengthen the city council's governance arrangements and will monitor the implementation of recommendations to improve and enhance the arrangements as part of our next annual review.


Signed:


..... Leader of the Council: Cllr Jane Ashworth (from 25th May 2023)

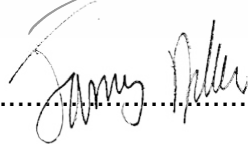
Date:


..... City Director: Jon Rouse

Date:


..... Section 151 Officer: Nick Edmonds

Date:


..... Monitoring Officer: James Doble

Date:

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APPENDIX 1

Principle A – Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.

Ref	How we can demonstrate that the city council meets this principle	Evidence
PA.1	<p>The city council promotes high standards of ethical behaviour by developing, maintaining and monitoring a Code of Conduct for Members of the city council. The Code of Conduct clearly sets out the standards expected for elected Councillors to ensure they operate in a clear, transparent manner and treat each other, and members of the public, with respect and courtesy. The Code and the city council’s policies and procedures are communicated via corporate induction sessions and are available on the city council’s intranet site.</p>	<p>Members Code of Conduct & Staff Code of Conduct are included in the city council’s <u>Constitution</u></p>
PA.2	<p>The Codes of Conduct for Members and city council employees include the requirement to disclose interests (including statutory Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) and to declare gifts and hospitality. The Members Gifts and Hospitality Register is available on the city council’s website on the Transparency pages.</p>	<p><u>Councillor’s Register of Interests</u></p>
PA.3	<p>Comprising of nine councillors, allocated on the basis of the political composition of the council, the city council’s Standards Committee is responsible for helping Members to adhere to the Members Code of Conduct and promoting other elements of sound ethical behaviour.</p> <p>The Committee, in conjunction with the Monitoring Officer, deals with complaints against Members and this may involve the undertaking of investigations or some other form of action being taken, such as additional training. The Committee also issues (and updates) local codes of guidance from time to time, such as a Code on Criminal Records Bureau checks and guidance on dealing with planning and licensing determinations.</p>	<p><u>Standards Committee</u></p> <p><u>Modern Day Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement 2020</u></p>

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<p>PA.4</p>	<p>The city council has an established Procurement Process Guide in place to ensure an ethical and robust process. This enables a clear and documented end to end procurement process that supports probity, provides effective stewardship of public funds and meets the needs of the business.</p>	<p><u>Procurement Process Guide</u></p>
<p>PA.5</p>	<p>The city council has an established corporate compliments, comments and complaints process. In the event that the procedure is exhausted, the Ombudsman is required to carry out an investigation into a complaint.</p> <p>The Ombudsman's Annual letter is published on the LGO's own website.</p>	<p><u>Compliments, Comments and Complaints Process</u></p> <p><u>Ombudsman Annual Letter 2020</u></p>
<p>PA.6</p>	<p>The city council has a Counter-Fraud & Error Strategy as well as a Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Procedure to ensure that members and employees of the authority are not influenced by prejudice, bias or conflicts of interest in dealing with different stakeholders. The Audit Committee receives regular update reports outlining progress in implementing key anti-fraud actions to protect the city council's interests.</p>	<p><u>Statement on Countering Fraud, Corruption and Error</u></p> <p><u>Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Procedure</u></p>
<p>PA.7</p>	<p>In response to the Covid-19 emergency situation a full analysis of all changes to legislation has been produced and circulated to senior officers. Changes were also made to the city council's constitution to respond to the emergency situation to enable decision making to continue was agreed by full city council on 26th March 2020.</p>	<p>Covid-19 Legislation Schedule (internal document only)</p> <p><u>Amendments to Part 2 and Part 3 of the city council's Constitution</u></p>

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Principle B – Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Ref	How we can demonstrate that the city council meets this principle	Evidence
PB.1	The city council publishes its decisions on its website; on this page you can find a record of executive decisions made under the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations	Notice of Decisions
PB.2	The city council is committed to openness and transparency. Meeting items are only discussed in private if they absolutely cannot be discussed in any other way ³ . City council and Cabinet Meetings are broadcast live on the internet, and are available online to be watched after the event.	City council Meeting Webcasts Cabinet & City Council Meetings
PB.3	<p>The city council places communications at the centre of all that it does. The communications strategy which is underpinned by the city council's Stronger Together vision sets out an approach which aims to improve communications with local people as well as a number of key stakeholders across the city through a series of pre-agreed campaigns. This approach proactively supports engaging local people and stakeholders in democracy and city council services in a number of ways across a number of digital and more traditional channels.</p> <p>The city council's Community Cohesion Strategy has been developed taking into account the views of young people and consultation with statutory, voluntary and community partners.</p>	<p>Corporate Communication Strategies Quarterly Priorities are agreed with Cabinet Leads, the City Director and Directors.</p> <p>Community Cohesion Strategy 2020-2024</p>
PB.4	The city council has an established customer feedback procedure which enables those in the City to engage with the organisation and offer ideas, suggestions, compliments and complaints. The Annual Customer Feedback Report for 2017/18 was published in September 2018 and shows an increase in the number of complaints received although there was a reduction in the number of statutory complaints about social care services. The 2019/20 report is due to be presented to Cabinet on 15 December 2020.	Customer Feedback Procedure Customer Services Standards Annual Customer Feedback Report 2019/2020

³ Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

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<p>PB.5</p>	<p>The City Council Operating Plan for 202/2021 has been reported to the Cabinet on the delivery of the priorities and objectives of the Stronger Together Strategic Plan 2020-2024.</p>	<p><u>Stronger Together Priorities</u> Operating Plan 2020-2021 (Internal only)</p>
<p>PB.6</p>	<p>The city council communicates through its website regarding the city council's vision, achievements, financial position and performance. The website has recently been redeveloped to provide the public with easier access to information and services. Various parts of the organisation use a variety of social media, including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, google+, Pinterest and Flickr to engage and inform communities and stakeholders. The Communications Team also provides related media releases, where appropriate.</p> <p>In 2019 the city council launched brief weekly news updates which include headline stories and important corporate information, the bulletin - called Our Week – is emailed to staff every Wednesday. There is also be a fortnightly Our Learning bulletin providing up-to-date training, development and learning information and an Our Wellbeing newsletter including all the latest health and wellbeing opportunities available to staff.</p>	<p><u>Stoke-on-Trent City Council Website Including Coronavirus Updates</u> <u>Face book</u> <u>Face book live Question and Answer Sessions (C19)</u> <u>Main News Page</u> Our Week (internal document only) Our Learning (internal document only) Our Wellbeing (internal document only)</p>

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<p>PB.7</p>	<p>Engaging with our communities is essential to ensure that we are a resident led authority. Consultation exercises are carried out as required; for example, consultation on the Budget has become a regular component of the budget setting process. Consultation meetings were held across the Medium-term Financial Strategy period to consult on the budget proposals.</p> <p>The city council also conducted a number of online consultations in the year including the rights of way improvement plan; how do you use your chemist; elective home education policy, social workers survey to support carers and when would you like to shop at our markets.</p>	<p><u>Budget Consultation 2020-2021</u></p>
<p>PB.8</p>	<p>Enhancing the accountability for service delivery and effectiveness of other public service providers is demonstrated through the reporting mechanisms for joint arrangements, such as the Health and Well Being Board, Adult Strategic Partnership, CYS Partnership, Responsible Authorities Group and the Youth Offending Service Board, - all of whom deliver services in partnership with Staffordshire PCT, Staffordshire Police, Probation Services and the city council. The city council works in close partnership with the Stoke and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership to develop investment and business growth across the region.</p>	<p><u>Health and Wellbeing Board</u> <u>Stoke-on-Trent Adults' Strategic Partnership</u> <u>Safeguarding Children's Board</u> <u>Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board</u> <u>Stoke and Staffs LEP Partnership</u></p>
<p>PB.9</p>	<p>In response to the Covid-19 emergency situation, the city council has produced a number of updates to keep all key stakeholders informed. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily updates to staff and video messages from the City Director and the leader • An update to Cabinet • Comprehensive information for the public on the city council's website • Information and support for Businesses signposted from the city council's website • Facebook live event 	<p>Daily Covid-19 email to staff (internal document only) Media Relations Protocol (internal document only)</p> <p><u>City Director Report to Cabinet on Covid</u> <u>Director of Public Health Annual Report</u></p>

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Principle C – Defining Outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.

Ref	How we can demonstrate that the city council meets this principle	Evidence
PC.1	<p>In 2019/20 the city council continued to embed its Stronger Together Priorities as part of its long term Strategic Vision for 2016-2020. These priorities set out what the city council will strive to achieve for the city over the coming years, working with the citizens of Stoke-on-Trent as well as partner organisations to deliver improvements to our great city. In January 2020, the city council agreed the strategic vision for the period from 2020 to 2024. The new vision comprises five priorities and 25 strategic objectives and was been developed in consultation with Cabinet. The vision is the basis for a more detailed strategic plan, which will be developed in 2020.</p>	<p><u>Stronger Together Priorities 2020-2024</u></p> <p>Operating Plan 2020 (Internal only)</p> <p><u>Strategic Performance & Framework 2020 (A)</u></p> <p><u>Strategic Plan 2020-2024</u></p>
PC.2	<p>The Stronger Together Strategic Plan provides a clear vision for Stoke-on-Trent, to create a city we can all be proud of. This vision is underpinned by five priorities which guide everything the city council does:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support our residents to fulfil their potential; • Support our businesses to thrive, delivering investment in our towns and communities; • Work with residents to make our towns and communities great places to live; • A commercial council, well governed and fit for purpose, driving efficiency in everything we do; • Support vulnerable people in our communities to live their lives well. <p>Sitting underneath the five priorities are 29 strategic objectives which describe the areas where the organisation will drive change over the next four years. To guide the delivery of our priorities and objectives there are five cross cutting values. They describe how we will work and how we would like to work with others, across organisational and geographical boundaries.</p>	<p><u>Strategic Plan 2020-2024</u></p> <p><u>Strategic Measures Q1 2020-2021</u> <u>Strategic Measures Q1 2020-2021 (2)</u></p> <p><u>Strategic Measures Q2 (1) 2020/2021</u> <u>Strategic Measures Q2 (2) 2020/2021</u></p> <p><u>Strategic Measures Q3 2020/2021</u> <u>Strategic Measures Q3 (2) 2020/2021</u></p> <p><u>Strategic Measures Q4 (1)</u> <u>Strategic Measures Q4 (2)</u></p> <p><u>Medium Term Financial Strategy & Council Tax Setting 2020/2021</u></p>

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<p>PC.3</p>	<p>The city council has adopted in full CIPFA’s Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities and their Treasury Management Code of Practice. The city council receives specialist support from Arlingclose on all aspects of borrowing, lending and investments.</p> <p>Reserves strategy and forecasts are clearly set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy and are monitored through the quarterly Finance updates. Opportunities for strengthening the reserves position are routinely considered as part of the account closure exercise. The revenue budget is set and will be reviewed on a regular basis.</p>	<p><u>Capital Investment Programme Update 2020/2021 - 2025/2026</u> <u>Capital Investment Programme Update 2020/2021 - 2025/2026 (App A)</u> <u>Capital Investment Programme Update 2020/2021 - 2025/2026 (App B)</u> <u>Capital Investment Programme Update 2020/2021 - 2025/2026 (App C)</u></p> <p><u>Medium Term Financial Strategy & Council Tax Setting 2020/2021</u> <u>CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice 2020/2021</u></p>
<p>PC.4</p>	<p>The annual report on the Treasury Management Strategy for 2020/21, incorporating the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement, Investment Strategy and Prudential and Treasury Indicators 2020/21 required under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2003 was approved by city council in February 2020 (having been considered by the Audit Committee).</p> <p>Member awareness and engagement on Treasury Management issues is progressed through development events and regular updates.</p>	<p><u>Treasury Management Annual Borrowing & Investment Strategy & Minimum Provision Policy</u></p>

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PC.5	<p>The council have produced a one-year Asset Management Plan to set out the continuing work of Asset Maximisation and brings together the priorities for delivery for operational property, the accommodation strategies and plans and how the decisions taken to drive these also provide a greater level of opportunity for physical regeneration within the City.</p>	<p><u>Asset Management Plan 2021</u></p>
PC.6	<p>In response to the Covid-19 emergency situation the city council has undertaken an economic impact survey to assess the economic impact on the City. This will be used to define how the city council can support businesses in the city in the recovery phase.</p>	<p>Covid-19 Survey (now closed)</p>

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Principle D – Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.

Ref	How we can demonstrate that the city council meets this principle	Evidence
PD.1	<p>Financial and non-financial performance reports are presented on a monthly basis at Senior Management Team Meetings (SMT) and taken to Cabinet each quarter.</p> <p>For 2019/2020 the Mid-Year update identified that it was necessary to make further savings in order to achieve a balanced budget and proposals to meet these savings were identified, reported and consulted upon twice prior to being agreed. The content of the reports demonstrates the city council's progress in achieving against the performance measures and budgets across city council activities and are used to highlight examples of excellence in service delivery, as well as monitoring areas requiring improvement. Reports are also provided to Overview and Scrutiny Committees for each respective service area.</p>	<p><u>Financial Performance Q1 2020/2021</u></p> <p><u>Financial Performance Q2 2020/2021</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2020/2021 App A</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 Annex A</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2020/2021 Annex B</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2020/2021 Annex Ci</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 Annex Cii</u></p> <p><u>Financial Performance Report Q3 2020/2021</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 Annex A</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2020/2021 Annex B</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2020/2021 Annex Ci</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2020/2021 Annex Cii</u></p> <p><u>Financial Performance Provisional Outturn 2020 - 2021 (Appendix A)</u> <u>Financial Performance Provisional Outturn 2020 - 2021 (Annex A)</u> <u>Financial Performance Provisional Outturn 2020 - 2021 (Annex B)</u> <u>Financial Performance Provisional Outturn 2020 - 2021 (Annex Ci)</u> <u>Financial Performance Provisional Outturn 2020 - 2021 (Annex Cii)</u></p>

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	<p>The city council monitors a set of strategic measures to understand performance against the Stronger Together priorities. The Strategic Measures are reported to the Senior Management Team (SMT), Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny on a quarterly basis and are refreshed annually to ensure they remain up to date and relevant. SMT consider corporate health performance information on a monthly basis which includes customer feedback, sickness absence & HR data, health & safety and customer services information. Key Directorate KPIs are also reviewed on a monthly basis with a focus on a specific directorate each month. The city council continues to work with partners and reports performance on a quarterly basis to various boards including Health & Wellbeing Board and Children & Young Peoples Strategic Partnership Board.</p>	<p>Strategic Measures Q1 2020-2021 Strategic Measures Q1 2020-2021 (2) Strategic Measures Q2 (1) 2020/2021 Strategic Measures Q2 (2) 2020/2021 Strategic Measures Q3 2020/2021 Strategic Measures Q3 (2) 2020/2021 Strategic Measures Q4 (1) Strategic Measures Q4 (2) Treasury Management Q3 Review 2020/2021</p> <p>Overview & Scrutiny Committees</p>
<p>PD.2</p>	<p>In determining the courses of action to take decisions are informed by the city council’s strategic priorities and objectives (its strategy and key performance indicators) which subsequently inform a clear planning methodology and long term direction for its business activities. To support this, the city council ensures it has an adequate and all-inclusive budget process.</p>	<p>Medium Term Financial Strategy & Council Tax Setting 2020/2021 Strategic Measures Q2 (1) 2020/2021 Strategic Measures Q2 (2) 2020/2021 Strategic Measures Q3 2020/2021 Strategic Measures Q3 (2) 2020/2021 Strategic Measures Q4 (1) Strategic Measures Q4 (2)</p>
<p>PD.3</p>	<p>A Housing Strategy has been created to enhance Stoke-on-Trent’s housing offer so that people at all stages of life can find and live in a quality home they want at a price they can afford.</p>	<p>Housing Strategy 2017-22 Housing Revenue Account Asset Management Strategy</p>
<p>PD.4</p>	<p>“Making Stoke-on-Trent a digitally inclusive city”. Enabling more people to access the internet has the potential to transform the way in which citizens access local services and make choices about aspects of their own lives, while simultaneously reducing demand for key services.</p>	<p>Digital Inclusion Strategy 2016-20</p>

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<p>PD.5</p>	<p>Our vision is for Stoke-on-Trent to be a vibrant, healthy and caring city which supports its citizens to live more fulfilling, independent and healthy lives. Our objective is to promote personal responsibility, early intervention and independence by involving communities in the way our services are shaped. We will encourage community leadership, a strong focus on efficiency, value for money and ease of access to services.</p>	<p><u>Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021 - 2025</u></p> <p><u>Joint Dementia Strategy 2021-2024</u></p>
<p>PD.6</p>	<p>A set of Equality Objectives for the city council for the period 2021-2024 have been developed.</p>	<p><u>Equality Objectives 2021-2024</u></p>
<p>PD.7</p>	<p>In response to the Covid-19 emergency situation undertook a number of initiatives to support the most vulnerable people across the city. The Stoke-on-Trent Together campaign, run by the city council in partnership with the voluntary sector organisation VAST, was set up to support those who were self-isolating.</p> <p>The city council is also currently developing an economic recovery plan for the city in response to the pandemic.</p>	<p><u>S-o-T Together</u></p> <p>Economic Recovery Plan (internal document only)</p> <p><u>Powering up Stoke</u></p>

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Principle E – Developing the entity’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.

Ref	How we can demonstrate that the city council meets this principle	Evidence	
PE.1	The city council participates in multiple benchmarking exercises and uses the information for financial and service quality comparisons. Learning from other entities enables the city council to achieve value for money and best practice service delivery.	Benchmarking	
PE.2	The city council has four statutory ⁴ posts with responsibility for governance.	Statutory / Mandatory posts	Post within current structure
		Head of Paid Service	City Director
		Chief Financial Officer and s151 Officer	Director of Strategy & Resources
		Monitoring Officer	Assistant Director Governance
		Senior Information Risk Owner	Assistant Director Governance

⁴ There are other statutory roles, including the Director of Children’s Services and the Caldicott Guardian, currently held by the Assistant Director – Commissioning, Health and Social Care

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<p>PE.3</p>	<p>The Constitution sets out a Scheme of Delegation, Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules.</p> <p>The Scheme of Delegation gives officers authority to act within the policies and objectives defined by the executive and the city council as a whole. The scheme has been extended to Assistant Directors and work continues to extend further to Strategic Managers. The Financial Regulations underpin the effective management of the city council’s financial arrangements and the Contract Procedure Rules govern the making of contracts for and on behalf of the city council.</p> <p>The city council’s Constitution sets out the framework for decision making and the formal reporting of those decisions. Decision making is underpinned by a framework of policies, plans and strategies. These are referred to as the Budget and Policy Framework and are identified within the Constitution. The Constitution is kept under review by the Assistant Director - Governance, (the city council’s Monitoring Officer).</p> <p>These documents are comprehensively reviewed on a regular basis by the Constitution Working Group with amendments being approved by full city council.</p>	<p><u>Constitution</u></p> <p><u>Constitution Working Group</u></p>
<p>PE.4</p>	<p>For our elected Members, the city council produces an annual Learning and Development Plan supported by a calendar of training events and workshops. These continued to adhere to the best practice guidelines given in the Local Government Association’s Member Development Charter.</p>	<p>Councillor Induction Plan 2019 (Internal only) <u>Role of a Councillor</u></p>

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<p>PE.5</p>	<p>In compliance with the data transparency code, the city council has published its senior management structure and pay structure.</p> <p>The city council publishes an annual pay policy, last approved by city council in February 2019.</p> <p>Information is also provided about member’s remuneration (NB Members Allowances for 2019/2020 are due May/June and will be included in the final AGS)</p>	<p><u>Pay Policy Statement 2020/2021</u></p> <p><u>Members Allowances 2020/2021</u></p>
<p>PE.6</p>	<p>The city council recognises that its employees are central to its success. Training for staff is developed via information from annual P.L.A.N - Progress, Learning, Actions, Nurture. The employee performance framework exists to promote performance and identify development needs. A revised performance appraisal process is currently being developed.</p> <p>Staff also undertake a range of compulsory e-learning on topics such as health and safety and data protection.</p> <p>A leadership event lead by the new City Director for all Senior Manager was planned for March 2020. This has been delayed due to the Covid-19 emergency.</p>	<p>P.L.A.N – Progress, Learning, Actions, Nurture</p> <p>E-learning Programme</p> <p>Stronger Together Management Programme</p>
<p>PE.7</p>	<p>In response to the Covid-19 emergency situation the City Director has provided daily updates for all staff. A health and wellbeing pack was also distributed to all staff.</p>	<p>Daily Covid-19 Updates from the City Director (internal document only)</p> <p>Health & Well-being Packs for Staff (Internal Document only)</p>

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Principle F – Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

Ref	How we can demonstrate that the city council meets this principle	Evidence
PF.1	<p>The Management of Risk Policy sets out the city council’s strategy for ensuring that effective risk management is embedded within all areas of the city council’s operations. It also requires that all managers and Councillors address the issue of associated risk whilst making any and all policy decisions. The Audit Committee reviews the Strategic Risk Register annually.</p> <p>The system of internal control is designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the city council’s policies, aims and objectives and to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.</p>	<p><u>Strategic Risk Register</u></p> <p><u>Management of Risk Policy March 2021</u></p>
PF.2	<p>The city council’s Financial Management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA statement on the role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2016). Information on the financial performance of the city council provided to budget managers and senior officers is well presented, timely, complete and accurate. Real time desk top budget information is available to budget holders across the city council.</p>	<p><u>Financial Performance Q1 2020/2021</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2020/2021</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2020/2021 App A</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 Annex A</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2020/2021 Annex B</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2020/2021 Annex Ci</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 Annex Cii</u> <u>Financial Performance Report Q3 2020/2021</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 Annex A</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2020/2021 Annex B</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2020/2021 Annex Ci</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2020/2021 Annex Cii</u></p> <p><u>Strategic Measures Q2 (1) 2020/2021</u> <u>Strategic Measures Q2 (2) 2020/2021</u> <u>Strategic Measures Q3 2020/2021</u> <u>Strategic Measures Q3 (2) 2020/2021</u> <u>Strategic Measures Q4 (1)</u> <u>Strategic Measures Q4 (2)</u></p>

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		<p><u>Treasury Management Annual Report 2019/2020 & Q1 Performance</u></p>
<p>PF.3</p>	<p>The city council's policies and staff training programme promote compliance with information legislation. To support this, data protection courses have been further updated for both officers and councillors. Training for senior managers is complete and relevant policies are in place in line with current legislation. We comply with standards for public sector data handling and security and have achieved Public Services Network certification every year since its launch. The city council has met the standards required by the new NHS Data Security and Protection Toolkit which was launched in 2018.</p> <p>The city council is a signatory to the One Staffordshire county-wide information sharing protocol to ensure that when data is shared with our partners it is done in a transparent, compliant and consistent way.</p>	<p>Data Protection Policy (Internal only)</p> <p>Data Sharing Policy (Internal only)</p> <p>Information Governance Policy (Internal only)</p>
<p>PF.4</p>	<p>The city council's review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control is informed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directorate assurance based on management information, performance information, officer assurance statements and Scrutiny reports • The work undertaken by Internal Audit during the year. • The work undertaken by the External Auditor reported in their annual audit and inspection letter. • Other work undertaken by independent inspection bodies. <p>In February 2018 an external review of the internal audit function was undertaken by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). The review gave the city council's internal audit service the highest category of "Generally Conforms" to the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and those of the Local Government Application Note.</p>	<p><u>Internal Audit Monitoring Q1</u></p> <p><u>Internal Audit Monitoring Q2</u></p> <p><u>Internal Audit Monitoring Q3</u></p> <p><u>External Review of Internal Audit</u></p> <p><u>Final Report on External Audit Recommendations</u></p>

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<p>PF.5</p>	<p>The city council has a Corporate Strategy for the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption. A key area of work during 2019/20 continues to be Housing Tenancy Fraud and in particular Right to Buy where the implementation of enhanced due diligence checks and robust anti-money laundering controls have been hugely successful in preventing non bona fide Right to Buy applications thereby protecting the public purse. Results of fraud investigations are publicised on the internet using the city council's social media presence and also in the local media to promote the city council's 'Zero Tolerance Against Fraud' approach.</p> <p>The city council participates in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI), this is a range of annual and biennial data matching exercises led by the Cabinet Office that matches electronic data within and between public and private sector bodies to prevent and detect fraud. Regular updates on these exercises are provided to the Audit Committee.</p>	<p><u>Statement on Countering Fraud, Corruption & Error</u></p> <p>National Fraud Initiative</p>
<p>PF.6</p>	<p>In response to the Covid-19 emergency situation the city council produced risk registers for the most vulnerable groups across the city together with guidance notes for staff on risk management during the pandemic. The risk registers were reviewed by Gold Command on a regular basis.</p>	<p>Risk guidance for covid-19 (Internal only)</p> <p>Coivid-19 Risk Registers (Internal only)</p> <p>Covid-19 Workforce planning guidance (Internal only)</p>

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Principle G – Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit, to deliver effective accountability.

Ref	How we can demonstrate that the city council meets this principle	Evidence
PG.1	<p>In line with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, the city council is required to publish certain types of information for transparency purposes, This information can be found on the city council’s website along with monthly Transparency Reports.</p> <p>A record of executive decisions made under the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 are published on the city councils website. Information is also provided about member’s remuneration.</p>	<p><u>Transparency Report Jan 2021</u></p> <p><u>Members Allowances 2020/2021</u></p> <p><u>Notice of Decisions</u></p>
PG.2	<p>The city council operates a number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees that consist of Elected Members who undertake annual work programmes. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees are aligned to the directorates within the city council. Their two main functions are to hold decision makers to account and to also develop and review policy.</p>	<p><u>Overview & Scrutiny</u></p>
PG.3	<p>The Statement of Accounts is published and produced in compliance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 presenting a true and fair view of the financial performance of the city council in the delivery of services to the citizens of Stoke-on-Trent. The accounts are subject to independent external audit and are made available via the city council’s website. This is seen as an essential feature of public accountability and stewardship as it provides an annual report on how the city council has used the public funds for which it is responsible.</p>	<p><u>Published Accounts 2018/2019</u></p>

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<p>PG.4</p>	<p>The Audit Committee has responsibility for conducting an annual review of the effectiveness of the governance framework, including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness will be informed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ City council officers, responsible for the development and maintenance of the governance environment □ The Strategic Manager, Audit and Fraud’s annual report □ Comments and observations made by external auditors and external review agencies and inspectors. <p>The Committee also report on their activities to full council.</p>	<p><u>Roles & Responsibilities 2020</u></p> <p><u>Audit Committee Annual Report 2020/2021</u></p>
<p>PG.5</p>	<p>The city council’s assurance arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the role of the Head of Internal Audit (2020). Information on the work of Internal Audit is provided to managers and senior officers and is well presented, complete and accurate. Summary reports are provided to the Audit Committee on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>The annual report of the Strategic Manager, Audit and Fraud summarises the audit work undertaken during 2020/2021. Where recommendations have been made to improve processes these are being addressed by appropriate officers. From the work undertaken in 2020/2021 by Internal Audit, the Strategic Manager, Audit and Fraud was able to give the following assurance:</p> <p><i>“From the work carried out by Internal Audit during 2020/21, it has been concluded that the level of assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of the city council’s control environment is Satisfactory.”</i></p>	<p><u>Internal Audit Charter</u></p> <p><u>Internal Audit Annual Report 2020/2021</u></p>
<p>PG.6</p>	<p>In response to the Covid-19 emergency situation a revised governance structure was put into place that was communicated to all staff. This consisted of a Gold Command for strategic decisions lead by the City Director and a Silver Command for operational tasks led by the Director of Housing & Consumer Services as the Business Continuity lead.</p>	<p><u>Covid-19 Governance structure (Internal only)</u> <u>Coronavirus Recovery Framework</u></p> <p><u>Coronavirus Governance Structure (App 1)</u></p> <p><u>Coronavirus Recovery Framework (App 2)</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement - Annex

(September 2024)

Introduction

- A1 Due to the delay in signing the 2020/21 accounts and Annual Governance Statement, details of significant developments relating to the council's governance arrangements are provided in the following paragraphs.

External Inspections

- A2 In October 2022, Ofsted undertook a full inspection of our local authority children's services (ILACS). During a three-week, in-depth inspection, Ofsted reviewed the impact of leaders on social work practice; the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection; and children in care and care leavers. The result of the inspection was an overall effectiveness of requires improvement to be good. This represents significant and sustained progress since our last full inspection in 2019. The inspection found many areas of strength, including our re-designed front door, our support for children who are being exploited or missing from care, and our services for children in care and care leavers which were rated good.
- A3 The council's improvement journey continues and will be overseen by regular meetings of the Children's Improvement Board, chaired by our Children's Commissioner, so that we remain on track with progress. We will continue to seek support from the Department for Education and learn from areas with good practice. The council are currently revising our continuous improvement plan to draw on learning from the inspection findings and to identify the steps needed so we can progress to good. Focus areas in this plan will include embedding and sustaining consistent and high quality practice, improving recruitment and retention of staff, and work to provide sufficiency of local services to sustainably meet demand.
- A4 The council's next full ILACS will be in 2025. In addition, we have been subject to a SEND local area inspection, a focused visit and potentially a joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) which looks at partnership services. The council remains under a statutory direction to co-operate with the Children's Services Commissioner, continue to accept support from Leeds City Council as formal improvement partner and to engage in Department for Education reviews on a 6-monthly basis.

Other Governance Issues

- A5 The city council's financial assessments team's functions include carrying out financial assessments for residential and non-residential care, act as appointees and deputies for adults who lack capacity and direct payments for children and adults. In April 2020, the service transferred from corporate finance to revenues and benefits. Following the transfer of the service, a review of staffing, processes and procedures and internal controls was undertaken. One of the key risks identified within this review related to Court of Protection reconciliation processes and as such focus was concentrated on this area. A number of potential internal control and reconciliation weaknesses were identified that needed to be considered and addressed. Following an internal audit review, an action plan was

developed and a full reconciliation of the existing individual accounts commenced. This included new reconciliation procedures being put in to place for new transactions, guidance and training of staff regarding the new processes. An historic reconciliation was also undertaken which included the review of 100,000s of transactions. The council have been in ongoing dialogue with the Office of the Public Guardian (OPG) regarding the reconciliation and they have offered their support to the council in addressing the issues and the council will maintain an open dialogue with the OPG as further improvements are undertaken. An extensive piece of work has been carried out to ensure all balances for Court of Protection clients are correct and a report on addressing this was presented to the Audit and Standards Committee in March 2023 and May 2024 under closed agenda items. The process for carrying out the reconciliation for court of protection work is being transferred from a manual process to an automated one. This will reduce the risk of manual intervention in relation to the court of protection function. The council continues to liaise with the OPG and update an action plan on a quarterly basis and the OPG are satisfied with the progress made. The council has now started to open individual bank accounts for all deputyship and appointeeship clients, 150 accounts are now open and applications for debit cards for individuals continue to be made.