

## **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT ACTION PLAN 2021/22 UPDATE**

<b>Meeting</b>	Governance and Audit Committee
<b>Date</b>	9 March 2022
<b>Report Author</b>	Director of Law and Democracy
<b>Portfolio Holder</b>	Cllr Ash Ashbee, Leader
<b>Status</b>	For Information
<b>Classification:</b>	Unrestricted
<b>Previously Considered by</b>	Governance and Audit Committee 1 December 2021
<b>Ward:</b>	All

### **Executive Summary:**

A report to update the committee on progress in the 2021/22 Annual Governance Statement Action Plan

### **Recommendation(s):**

The committee is asked to note the update.

### **Corporate Implications**

#### **Financial and Value for Money**

There are no financial implications to the report.

#### **Legal**

Regulation 6(1)(a) of the Accounts and Audit regulations 2015 requires the council to conduct a review at least once a year of the effectiveness of its system of internal control and include a statement reporting on the review with any published statement of accounts. Regulation 6(1)(b) of the Regulations requires that the statement is the Annual Governance Statement. The regular review of the action plan under the AGS supports its system of internal control.

#### **Corporate**

The Annual Governance Statement and its Action Plan is a corporate document and as such should be owned by all senior officers and members of the authority.

## Equality Act 2010 & Public Sector Equality Duty

Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to the aims of the Duty at the time the decision is taken. The aims of the Duty are: (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it, and (iii) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Protected characteristics: age, sex, disability, race, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief and pregnancy & maternity. Only aim (i) of the Duty applies to Marriage & civil partnership.

The Annual Governance Statement and its Action Plan supports the public sector equality duty directly.

## CORPORATE PRIORITIES

This report relates to the following corporate priorities: -

(delete as appropriate)

- Communities

### 1.0 Introduction and Background

1.1 The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2020/21 was approved by this committee at its meeting on 1 December 2021, signed by the Leader and Chief Executive in January 2022 and has been published.

1.2 The Action Plan contained in the AGS is set out below.

No	Issues	Summary of Action Proposed
1	Statutory Recommendations issued by external auditor	An independent consultant will be appointed to act as Independent Monitoring Officer and the actions set out in the auditor's report will be actioned and reported to GPC and Council as required
2.	Financial Regulations are out of date and need to be refreshed	A consultant was commissioned to undertake an independent review of the council's financial regulations and wider approach to Financial Management in May and June 2021. The council will consider how to implement the recommendations of this review later this year, which will help stabilise finances and to build for the future.
3.	Constitution is becoming out of date and in need of a comprehensive review	The following items were recommended by CRWP on 10 November and will be considered by the Standards Committee and Council in late

		<p>November/early December 2021:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amending for clarity the wording of the delegations for the Planning Committee in light of a recent Judicial Review case.</li> <li>• Amending the training timetable for members of Planning Committee and Licensing Committee to yearly training.</li> <li>• Amending the guidance within the Code of Conduct for Councillors in line with the LGA Guidance on Social Media</li> </ul> <p>In addition, the following items will be completed during this year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Scheme of Officer delegations</li> <li>• Financial Procedure Rules - in process</li> </ul>
4.	Is the Council's Constitution robust in times of emergency?	To review the lessons learnt locally and nationally from the coronavirus epidemic and to determine what changes (if any) should be made to our governance arrangements to cover future emergency situations.
5.	Review of Culture and Governance by Grant Thornton	This process is complete and has resulted in the issuing of the statutory recommendations as set out above and described elsewhere in the report.

## 2.0 Update

- 2.1 It is appropriate to update the committee about the progress against the action plan which is part of the committee's role in monitoring the effectiveness of the AGS and governance within the Council. The update is as follows:

Action No.	Update
1	Mr Quentin Baker, Monitoring Officer for Hertfordshire County Council, was appointed as the IMO in early December 2021. Mr Baker recently reported to the General Purposes Committee about progress. He has been given full access to all documents he wishes to see and has had several meetings. He hopes to be able to finalise his report asap but as yet we do not have a definite date.
2	A review of the Council's Financial Management was presented to Cabinet

	<p>in August 2021. Cabinet recognised that some of these changes will take time, but Members were looking forward to working through the action plan with officers.</p> <p>This will be completed in 2022/23</p>
3	<p>All the items above for review in the Constitution have been approved by CRWP, Standards and Council and the Constitution has been updated. There may be further revisions required following Mr Baker's final report.</p> <p>Recently, CRWP has considered possible revisions to the procedure for members' questions at Council and the procedure for asking questions on the Leader's statement</p>
4	<p>The IMO will comment on the robustness of the Constitution and any major revisions required.</p>
5	<p>Grant Thornton will receive the IMO's report and may make further comments or take further action.</p>

### 3.0 Options

3.1 The committee is recommended to receive and note the updates.

### 4.0 Next Steps

4.1 The next review will take place after the final report of the IMO and may therefore contain additional recommendations arising out of his report.

Contact Officer: *Estelle Culligan (Director of Law and Democracy)*

Reporting to: *Madeline Homer (Chief Executive)*

#### Annex List

*None*

#### Corporate Consultation

**Finance:** *Chris Blundell (Director of Finance)*

**Legal:** *N/A*