

Audit Committee

27 November 2023

**Annual Governance
Statement for the year April
2022 – March 2023**

Ordinary Decision



Report of Corporate Management Team

Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources

**Councillor Richard Bell, Deputy Leader and Cabinet member for
Finance**

Electoral division affected:

None

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To seek approval of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2022/23, attached in appendix 2.

Executive summary

- 2 The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 require the Council to prepare an AGS, which must accompany the Statement of Accounts.
- 3 A draft Annual Governance Statement for 2022/23 was considered by Audit Committee on 30 June 2023.
- 4 The AGS demonstrates the Council's compliance with the principles of good governance, and the review of effectiveness for 2022/23 concludes that the Council's corporate governance arrangements in place during the year were fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.
- 5 The review also concluded that eleven actions, listed in appendix C of the AGS, should be included in the plan of improvements to strengthen governance arrangements during 2023/24.

- 6 The improvement actions contained in the AGS attached at Appendix 2 remain in line with the draft AGS presented to Audit Committee in June, except that Action 2 (Develop a new corporate cyber recovery plan for key digital services with prioritised recovery targets and business continuity plans to further strengthen the Council's resilience to a successful cyber-attack) has a revised completion date of 31 December 2024.
- 7 Following feedback, three revisions have been made, in paragraph 12 of appendix 2, and in paragraphs 50 and 93 of appendix A to the AGS.

Recommendation

- 8 Audit Committee is requested to approve the AGS as attached at appendix 2.

Background

- 9 The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 require the Council to prepare an Annual Governance Statement (AGS), which must accompany the Statement of Accounts.
- 10 A draft Annual Governance Statement for 2022/23 was considered by Audit Committee on 30 June 2023.
- 11 The Corporate Director of Resources is responsible for co-ordinating and overseeing the Council's corporate assurance arrangements and prepares the AGS to demonstrate the Council's compliance with the principles of good governance and recommending improvements, to be published in the Council's Annual Statement of Accounts. The AGS is included in appendix 2.

Outcome of the Review

- 12 The outcome of the review of effectiveness is set out in the AGS and concludes that the Council's corporate governance arrangements in place during 2022/23 were fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.
- 13 The review also concluded that eleven actions, listed in appendix C of the AGS, should be included in the plan of improvements to strengthen governance arrangements during 2023/24.
- 14 As part of their audit of the Statement of Accounts, Mazars, the council's external auditor, has reviewed the draft AGS and they have informed us that they have no matters to raise.
- 15 Following further feedback, amendments have been made in the following three paragraphs: -
 - (a) Paragraph 12 of appendix 2 has been amended to reflect that the Constitution was approved by the Council in May 2023, not March 2023.
 - (b) The wording of paragraph 50 of appendix A to the AGS, which relates to the council's approach to planning, performance, projects and change, has been amended to better reflect the developments referenced.
 - (c) The wording of paragraph 93 of appendix A to the AGS, which relates to information governance, has been amended to better reflect current and planned governance arrangements.

Author

Kevin Roberts

Tel: 03000 269657

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The governance review process ensures that the Council discharges its statutory duties under the Local Government Act 1999 and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The Code of Corporate Governance enables the Council to demonstrate how it complies with the Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016.

Finance

There are no financial implications associated with this report. However, financial planning and management is a key component of effective corporate governance.

Consultation

Engaging local communities meets a core principle of the CIPFA/ SOLACE guidance.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Engaging local communities including hard to reach groups meets a core principle of the CIPFA/ SOLACE guidance.

Climate Change

There are no direct climate change implications, but good governance helps to avoid or minimise adverse impacts.

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

There are no impacts on staffing but ensuring the adequate capability of staff meets a core principle of the CIPFA/ SOLACE guidance.

Accommodation

There are no accommodation implications, but asset management is a key component of effective corporate governance.

Risk

There are no reportable risks associated with the report, but the assessment of corporate risk is a key component of the Council's governance arrangements.

Procurement

There are no procurement implications, but the procurement function helps meet several core principles of the CIPFA / SOLACE guidance by, for example, minimising fraud, corruption and non-compliance with legislation and good practice, thereby helping to secure value for money and effective service delivery.

Appendix 2: Annual Governance Statement 2022/23

INTRODUCTION

1. This statement meets the requirements of Regulation 6 (1) of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 in relation to the publication of an Annual Governance Statement (AGS). It explains how the Council's arrangements for the governance of its affairs complied with its [Local Code of Corporate Governance](#) for the year ended 31 March 2023.

CONTEXT

2. Summarised information relating to the constitution, structure, budget and services provided by Durham County Council, along with key statistical information about County Durham can be found on the [About Us](#) page on the Council's website.

SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

3. Durham County Council (the Council) is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively.
4. The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 require the Council to prepare an AGS, which must accompany the Statement of Accounts. The Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
5. In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, which includes arrangements for the management of risk and performance.
6. In January 2023, the Council approved, adopted and published on its website, a revised [Local Code of Corporate Governance](#), which is consistent with the principles of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)/ Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) Framework – "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government".

THE PURPOSE OF THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

7. The governance framework comprises the systems, processes, culture and values by which the Council is directed and controlled, and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits for the people of County Durham.
8. The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks occurring and the impact should they occur, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.
9. The governance framework has been in place across the Council for the year ended 31 March 2023 and up to the date of approval of the Statement of Accounts.

THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

10. The key elements of the Council's governance arrangements are detailed in the Council's [Local Code of Corporate Governance](#). This sets out the key documents and processes that determine the way the Council is directed and controlled to meet the seven core principles of the CIPFA / SOLACE Framework.
11. The Chief Executive, Chief Financial Officer and Head of Legal and Democratic Services meet as statutory officers twice a month to discuss matters relevant to their statutory functions and governance of the Council generally.
12. The Constitution Working Group, which consists of the lead members of each political group and the Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, and is chaired by the Leader of the Council, proposed amendments to the [Constitution](#) during the year which were approved by the Council. Changes following the annual review of the [Constitution](#) were approved by the Council in [May 2023](#).
13. The arrangements and rules of procedure for the Overview and Scrutiny function, including the membership, functions and scope of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and each Committee is set out in detail in the [Constitution](#). Terms of Reference for the Board and Committees are set within the context of the [Council Plan](#) and the [County Durham Vision 2035](#). The Democratic Services Manager is the designated scrutiny officer to discharge the functions required under the Localism Act 2011.

14. The following sections provide assurance that the Council has complied with each of these principles in practice, and also highlights where we have further improved our corporate governance arrangements during 2022/23.

REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

15. The Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the senior managers within the Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the annual report of the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager, and by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

16. Maintaining the effectiveness of the corporate governance framework involves the key member and officer roles outlined below, namely:

- The Executive
- Chief Financial Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Standards Committee
- Audit Committee

17. The Council's [Constitution](#) sets out the governance roles and responsibilities of these functions. In addition:

- The Corporate Director of Resources co-ordinates and oversees the Council's corporate assurance arrangements by:
 - Preparing and maintaining the Council's Code of Corporate Governance as a formal framework for the Council's governance arrangements.
 - Reviewing the systems, processes and documentation to determine whether they meet the requirements of this Code, reporting any breaches and recommending improvements.
 - Preparing an AGS to demonstrate the Council's compliance with the principles of good governance and recommending improvements.
- Internal Audit provides independent assurance on the effectiveness of the corporate governance framework.
- External Audit provides an independent opinion on whether the AGS is materially accurate.

18. The review was also informed by a statement provided by each Corporate Director commenting on the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements generally and how they impacted on their service areas. These included consideration of the effectiveness of internal controls.

19. The Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager provides an independent opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the system of internal control, risk management and governance arrangements which was incorporated in the Annual Internal Audit Report to the Audit Committee in June 2023. This opinion is based on audit reviews undertaken during the year which found all systems reviewed to give substantial or moderate assurance.
20. We are satisfied that, whilst recruitment and retention challenges have had an impact in reducing the overall number of individual assurance audits delivered than would normally be expected, in prioritising audit activity to areas of key risk and when taken together with work other sources of assurance being identified from within services themselves, sufficient internal audit work has been undertaken to allow us to draw a reasonable conclusion as to the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's system of internal control. Based on the work undertaken, we are able to provide a **Moderate** overall assurance opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control operating across the Council in 2022/2023. The level and nature of internal audit work undertaken has therefore not required the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager to provide a formal Limitation on the Opinion to be delivered and as such there are no qualifications to this opinion. This moderate opinion ranking provides assurance that there is a sound system of control in place, but there are some weaknesses and evidence of non-compliance with controls or ineffective controls.
21. Aligned to the seven principles of good governance, a detailed account of how the Council's governance arrangements have operated during 2022/23 is included in **appendix A**. An update on improvements identified in the 2021/22 Annual Governance Statement is included in **appendix B**.

CONCLUSION

22. We have been advised on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by the Audit Committee. In conclusion, we are satisfied that the Council's corporate governance arrangements in place during 2022/23 were fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework. Through the review of governance arrangements, and the work of both internal and external audit, we have identified eleven actions as part of ongoing improvements to further strengthen governance arrangements in 2023/24. These are shown in **appendix C**.

APPROVAL OF ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

Signed:

Amanda Hopgood
Leader of Durham County Council

John Hewitt
Chief Executive

Paul Darby
Corporate Director of Resources

APPENDIX A: Governance Arrangements during 2022/23

A full description of the Council's governance arrangements is set out in the [Local Code of Corporate Governance](#) aligned to the seven principles of good governance. The following paragraphs provide a detailed account of how the Council's governance arrangements have operated during 2022/23. Note that hyperlinks to committee reports are routed through the relevant meeting page, rather than directly to the report, as this enables the reader to navigate to other related documents, such as the appendices and minutes.

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

Behaving with integrity

1. The [Code of Our Values Behaviour and Conduct](#) explains our values, sets out the responsibilities we all have and the standards of behaviour that are expected of us. In April 2021, the process for declaring personal interests, [gifts and hospitality](#) was digitised so that heads of service receive notifications of declarations, which are recorded on the employee's personal file.
2. Our core values have been invaluable in shaping the response to Covid-19 and addressing the drivers of poverty, including food and energy inflation: -
 - (a) We will work together to achieve the best for people.
 - (b) We put people and communities at the heart of everything we do and value our employees.
 - (c) We value, trust and support each other.
 - (d) We embrace change and look for better ways to deliver services.
3. The [register of gifts, interests and hospitality for members](#) is available online. Staff declarations are monitored by their Head of Service. The Monitoring Officer also maintains quarterly oversight of the Register of Officers Gifts and Hospitality and presents an annual report to the Corporate Management Team.
4. The Contract Procedure Rules set out how contracts for goods, works, services and utilities should be put in place and managed, and specify record keeping and reporting requirements related to procurement activity.
5. In January 2022, the Council agreed to a [members' allowances scheme for 2022-2023](#), taking into account the views of the independent remuneration panel, which the Council is required by law to establish and maintain. The Council is also required in accordance with the Local Authorities ([Councillors' allowances](#)) (England) Regulations 2003 to publish the sum paid to each Member in respect of Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowance, Dependants' Carers' Allowance, Travelling and Subsistence Allowance and Co-optees Allowances.

Demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values

6. In December 2022, the [Standards Committee](#) considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, which provided details of the Local Government Association's report, 'Debate Not Hate: The Impact of Abuse on Local Democracy'. In January 2023, the [Council](#) agreed to sign the [Debate not Hate](#) statement and the Debate Not Hate Campaign has been added to the Standards Committee [Work Programme 2023/24](#).
7. The [2021/22 annual report of the Standards Committee](#), which is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by councillors, was presented to Council in September 2022.
8. Guidance on how to [make a complaint](#) is available on the Council's website. Quarterly customer feedback reports are presented to the [Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board](#), summarising performance in dealing with corporate and statutory complaints, and identifying actions to improve service provision.
9. The Committee receives a quarterly report on [national issues](#) relating to ethical governance relevant to the work of the Committee and considers whether to make recommendations in response so that the Council maintains best practice and learns lessons from experiences elsewhere.
10. An update on complaints against councillors, considered in accordance with the council's Local Assessment Procedure, is presented quarterly to [Standards Committee](#).
11. The [Slavery and human trafficking statement 2021-22](#) explains how the Council aims to understand and address all potential modern slavery and human trafficking risks related to its business. It outlines the steps in place to ensure modern slavery or human trafficking does not occur in the Council's own business, and the preventative measures to ensure this extends to any of its supply chains. This statement is subject to continual annual review and is published on the Council's website.

Respecting the rule of law

12. The [Environment, Health & Consumer Protection enforcement policy](#) sets out the standards and guidance applied by officers authorised to act on behalf of the Council in its role as regulator and enforcement agency. Officers must have regard to codes of conduct, legislation and other statutory provisions, and adhere to the 'principles of good regulation' when exercising regulatory functions to improve outcomes without imposing unnecessary burdens on individuals and businesses.
13. The Council has a [Counter Fraud & Corruption Strategy](#), through which it is committed to a zero-tolerance approach to fraud and corruption against the Council and its partners. The Corporate Fraud team examines all reports of fraud,

vigorously pursuing sanctions and prosecutions and, where possible, publicising successful cases. The [Protecting the Public Purse Annual Report 2022/2023](#) gives an account of the team's work between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 and the Update Activity Report gives an account of their work between 1 April 2022 and 30 September 2022. Since its' creation in 2015, the team has uncovered or intercepted over £14.8m of fraud, investigating over 4,500 cases across the authority, handling a diverse range of investigations.

14. [Selective licensing](#) of privately rented properties, which aims to drive up standards and thereby improve communities, came into effect in April 2022 until March 2027. The Council will have powers to regulate landlords and managing agents in areas that suffer from low housing demand or high levels of anti-social behaviour or deprivation.
15. In September 2022, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board were presented with a report on the [Annual Review of the Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000](#).
16. In September 2022, the Pension Fund Committee considered the [Procedure for Reporting Breaches](#) in relation to the Durham County Council Pension Fund and authorised the Corporate Director of Resources to finalise and implement the procedure, taking into account any comments from the Pension Fund Committee and Local Pension Board.
17. The Cabinet considered a report in [May 2022](#), which reviewed enforcement activities under the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991, the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, and the Licensing Act 2003 for the period April 2021 to March 2022 and sought approval of a new enforcement programme for 2022/23.

Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.

Openness

18. The Council seeks to make decisions that are open about actions, plans, resource use, forecasts, outputs and outcomes, with a presumption for openness and, where relevant, giving reasons for keeping any decision confidential. Clear reasoning and evidence are provided for decisions, being explicit about the criteria, rationale and considerations used, to ensure that the impact and consequences of those decisions are clear. These commitments are demonstrated, for example, by the decisions made by Cabinet in [March 2022](#) and [April 2022](#) in relation to reports on,
 - (a) Review of Durham Light Infantry (DLI) Collection and Archive and the potential future use of the former DLI Museum and Art Gallery and Grounds at Aykley Heads; and
 - (b) Review of Durham County Council Headquarters.

19. Lists of key decisions to be considered by the Council's Executive were submitted to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board in [June 2022](#), [September 2022](#), [October 2022](#), [December 2022 and January 2023](#), as required by the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Engaging comprehensively with institutional stakeholders

20. The Leader of the Council is the chair of the County Durham Partnership including: the board and forum, which bring together the board and local communities; five partnerships (Health and Wellbeing Board, Safe Durham Partnership, Economic Partnership, Environment and Climate Change Partnership and County Durham Together Partnership); Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership; Durham Safeguarding Adult Partnership; Better Together Voluntary and Community Sector Forum; and all Area Action Partnerships.

Examples of partnership working can be found in the following reports: -

- (a) County Durham Partnership updates to Cabinet in [June 2022](#), [November 2022](#) and [March 2023](#).
- (b) [Review of the Mental Health Strategic Partnership and the governance of Mental Health and Wellbeing across County Durham](#)
- (c) [Adopt Coast to Coast](#)
- (d) [Future Adult Social Care Reform Assurance](#)
- (e) [Storm Arwen review](#)
- (f) [Health and Care Integration](#)
- (g) [Border to Coast Pensions Partnership Governance Arrangements](#)
- (h) [County Durham Pound Project Update](#)
- (i) [Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme](#)
- (j) [UK Shared Prosperity Fund Update](#)

21. The Council continues to engage in the North East Local Enterprise Partnership and Combined Authority, taking a regional perspective and seeking to work across broader partnerships to secure investment. In January 2023, [Cabinet](#) considered a report of the Chief Executive, which provided a summary of the discussions with Government and the LA6 Councils relating to devolution in County Durham; and information relating the opportunities and impact of a devolution deal on County Durham.

22. The Consultation Officer Group supports the Council's approach to engaging stakeholders and oversees major consultations, which help improve services and influence decision-making.

23. The [Statement of Community Involvement](#) sets out our advice on how town and parish councils and Neighbourhood Forums should seek to involve and consult on the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans.

24. Following the Covid19 pandemic and the removal of legislation permitting virtual committee meetings, the Council reverted to face-to-face meetings from 1 March 2022.
25. The [framework for good workforce mental health in County Durham Businesses](#) supports small and medium sized businesses and voluntary and community sector organisations, which are less likely to have equitable access to good quality training and support for owners and employees. Also, the negative impact of poor mental health and wellbeing in these workplaces is likely to be bigger in terms of staff absence and reduced productivity.

Engaging with individual citizens and service users effectively

26. Consultation on the [Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2026/27](#) in October and November 2022 involved residents and partners and considered proposals to balance the council's budget for the next financial year (2023/24) that were published in the Cabinet report in October 2022. Presentations were made to the 14 Area Action Partnership Boards, and officers attended meetings of the County Durham Partnership, County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) and the Youth Council and met with Trade Unions representatives during the period of the consultation.
27. In March 2023, an update was given to Health and Wellbeing Board on the findings from the independent consultant on the review of the council's [community engagement function](#) and our approach to a public county wide consultation.
28. Public consultation exercises were undertaken during the year on a range of issues, including Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment, our Physical Activities Strategy, Veterans Health Needs Assessment, Growing Up in County Durham Strategy, Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy, Regeneration projects in Bishop Auckland and Horden, Supplementary Planning Documents that support our County Durham Plan, the Inclusive Economic Strategy, Leisure Transformation, Public Space Protection Orders, our Customer Services Review and Poverty Action Plan. The full list can be found on the [Consultations](#) pages of the website.
29. The Council uses various channels of communication and feedback mechanisms, including social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube) to reach out to and meet the needs of its communities.
30. Through our Integrated Customer Service initiative and Unified Communications Strategy, we continue to drive improvements across customer services to enhance the customer experience and reduce complaints. Automatic Call Distributor technology prompts telephone callers to 'describe in a few words' why they are calling and connects the person to the correct agent or department as well as offering a text message with a link to the appropriate information on the corporate website. The system also enables a holistic view of demand and performance statistics for all telephony contact, which is reported quarterly through Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

31. The following reports evidence the methods used by the Council to communicate with citizens and service users to provide feedback, publish information and to collect and evaluate their views, experiences and future needs: -
- (a) Questions from the public received by the County Council at its meetings in [June 2022](#), [July 2022](#), [October 2022](#), and [December 2022](#).
 - (b) Updates in relation to petitions received by the Council reported to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (COSMB) at its meetings in [September 2022](#) and [December 2022](#).
 - (c) Customer Feedback Report, Year End update, 2021/22 ([COSMB, July 2022](#)).
 - (d) Adults and Health Services Annual Statutory Representations Report 2020/21 ([COSMB, October 2022](#)).
 - (e) Presentation by the Director of Public Health on various public health campaigns ([Health and Wellbeing Board, January 2023](#)).
32. [Durham County News](#), the Council's magazine for residents is issued to every household in the County four times a year in line with the [recommended code of practice for local authority publicity](#).
33. Following the publication of the government Living with Covid guidance, the County Durham health protection governance arrangements were reviewed to align the robust Covid-19 assurance arrangements with wider health protection governance, capturing the learning and the successful approaches and interdependencies established during the Covid-19 response. The Health Protection Assurance and Development Partnership membership and Terms of Reference were revised accordingly.

Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.

Defining outcomes

34. The [County Durham Vision 2035](#) was agreed by the County Durham Partnership and Cabinet in September 2019. This vision will be delivered through an integrated framework of partnership and organisational plans and strategies across the County Durham Partnership. The vision is structured around three externally focused results-based ambitions of *more and better jobs*, *long and independent lives* and *connected communities*.
- (a) The More and Better Jobs ambition has a wide-ranging focus which includes not only development of the economy and creating jobs, but also working with young people and adults to help them into work, through good quality education and training.
 - (b) The Long and Independent Lives ambition focuses strongly on the health and wellbeing of the local population, including ensuring that all of our children and young people get the best start in life, and services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are improved. The ambition has a strong focus on improving mental as well as physical wellbeing.

- (c) The Connected Communities ambition focuses on making life better in local communities across the County. On how we ensure that children and young people have safe lives in safe communities where people support each other, and have access to high quality housing, good transport links and vibrant town and village centres. As it is a broad ambition, performance reporting is split into two areas of focus: safer communities, and sustainable communities.
35. In February 2022, Cabinet approved the updated [Tenancy Strategy 2022 - 2027](#), which sets out the Council's expectations to the registered providers of social housing operating within the County regarding the types of tenancy they should offer to their tenants.
36. Despite this very challenging financial period and the significant base budget pressures faced by the Council, the [Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2026/27 and Revenue and Capital Budget 2023/24](#) report includes some very positive outcomes for the people of County Durham including: -
- (a) continued support to protect the 54,700 working age households in receipt of low incomes through the continuation of the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme, where 80% of eligible households will continue to be awarded 100% relief against their Council Tax payments and where those left with a bill will receive up to £50 for pensioners and up to £110 for working age claimants of additional support next year,
 - (b) ongoing work with health partners to ensure health and social care funds are maximised for the benefit of vulnerable people through the services we provide,
 - (c) significant investment in capital expenditure including investment in school provision, in our town centres and infrastructure, including new transport schemes and maintenance of our highways and pavements. In total, additional capital investment of £121.9 million is recommended in this report.
37. In May 2023, the Health and Wellbeing Board endorsed the [Final Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2028](#), which is a legal requirement under the Health and Social Care Act 2012, to ensure health and social care agencies work together to agree services and initiatives which should be prioritised.
38. There are clear links between the Financial Management Code and the Governance Framework, particularly with its focus on achieving sustainable outcomes.
39. In April 2022, Cabinet adopted the [Special Educational Needs and Disability \(SEND\) Strategy](#) for the period 2022-24. At the heart of our approach to the strategy, which was developed through extensive stakeholder engagement and public consultation, is a vision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities that is the same as for all children and young people in County Durham: that they are safe and part of their community, have the best start in life, have good physical and mental health, and gain the education, skills, and experiences to prepare them for adulthood.

40. Other strategies and plans setting out the Council's intended outcomes include: -

- (a) [Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy 2022-2025](#)
- (b) [Care Leavers Strategy and Action Plan January 2022 – December 2024](#)
- (c) [Climate Emergency Response Plan 2022-24](#)
- (d) [Growing Up in County Durham Strategy 2023-25](#)
- (e) [Inclusive Economic Strategy](#)
- (f) [Final Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2028](#)
- (g) [Poverty Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2026](#) (following a consultation exercise undertaken April to August 2022)
- (h) [Road Safety Strategy 2022-2032](#)
- (i) [Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2022-2024](#)
- (j) [Youth Justice Plan 2022 - 2023](#)

Sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

41. In [April 2022](#), Cabinet declared an ecological emergency for County Durham. Accordingly, actions to address the ecological emergency will be reflected in future MTFP planning cycles and other projects and programmes. In December 2022, the Cabinet considered a report which outlined an initial strategy and action plan for Council activities in response to the declaration of an ecological emergency made in April 2022.
42. Through its [Accessibility Statement](#), the Council endeavours to make the full range of services available on our website accessible to everyone, regardless of their skill or technology. Also included is an account of the Council's level of the compliance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and plans to remedy non-accessible content. There is also a link to the enforcement procedure.
43. In November 2021, the Health and Wellbeing Board was presented with an overview of the work being undertaken to mitigate against COVID-19 vaccine inequality in underrepresented groups across County Durham.
44. The [Gender Pay Gap Report](#) and [Public Sector Equality Duty Report](#) set out Durham County Council's data, analysis and plans for long term improvements.
45. In October 2021, Cabinet endorsed the [Armed Forces Covenant](#), which is a promise by the nation, ensuring that serving and former armed forces personnel and their families are treated fairly and will not be disadvantaged in accessing public services by their military service.
46. In December 2022, the Pension Fund Committee considered a report that provided an update on the approach to Responsible Investment at Border to Coast Pension Partnership. As required by law, the Fund's Investment Strategy Statement includes details of how environmental, social and governance issues are incorporated into the investment decision-making process and a policy on investment stewardships - the exercise of rights (including voting rights) attaching to investments.

Principle D: Determining and planning the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

Determining interventions

47. The Council continues to ensure that decision makers receive an objective and rigorous analysis of options, highlighting risks and considering feedback from service users and relevant stakeholders. An example is the Durham County Council Headquarters Alternative Options Assessment, reported to [Cabinet, April 2022](#).
48. The [County Durham Commissioning and Delivery Plan 2020-2025](#) update report was presented to Health and Wellbeing Board on 24 November 2021. The Plan is administered by the County Durham Care Partnership Executive (of which the council is a partner) and helps shape commissioning decisions through understanding the needs of communities and individuals, so that collective resources and staff can be used to meet those needs. The Council submitted its Cost of Care and draft Market Sustainability Plan (MSP) to Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) in October 2022, as required by national guidance. Work is continuing with the markets in scope, including older persons care homes and domiciliary home care, to complete and submit a final MSP in late March 2023 as specified by DHSC. The Integrated Commissioning service has continued to strengthen its approach to governance in terms of provider support, including formal recruitment and training approaches through the Durham Care Academy; the establishment of a care home provider panel with a range of provider representatives; and widened scope of provider forums to include system issues relevant to local markets.

Planning interventions

49. Following a change in administration in May 2021, a new Council Plan was considered by Cabinet in April 2022 and approved by Council in June 2022. A [refreshed version of the plan](#) covering the four-year period 2023 – 2027 was approved by Council in February 2023. The Council Plan is the primary corporate planning document for the county council and details the Council's contribution towards achieving the objectives set out in the [Vision for County Durham 2035](#) together with its own objectives and change agenda. The Council Plan aligns to both the council's Medium-Term Financial Plan and the County Durham Plan, which is a spatial representation of our ambitions contained within the Council Plan around housing, jobs and the environment until 2035, as well as the transport, schools and infrastructure to support it. The Council Plan is underpinned by a series of corporate strategies and service planning arrangements providing more detailed information on the actions being undertaken to deliver on our priorities and to avoid duplication.

50. The Head of Corporate Affairs delivered a presentation to Audit Committee on the council's approach to planning, performance, major projects, and change. It was noted that, as a result of the Transformation Programme 2017 – 2022, the Council had delivered a successful change programme including: -

- A workforce benefiting from modern technology and flexible ways of working plus improved employee engagement.
- A model for partnership working based around a shared vision and County Durham Together Partnership.
- Redesigned our services to better meet customer's needs at reduced cost to the Council.

In the 2024/25 planning cycle, the aim is to deliver increased value for money by further strengthening the alignment of the processes for service planning, financial planning, performance management and service development.

51. The [Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2026/27 \(MTFP13\)](#), which was approved by the Council in February 2023, provides a financial framework associated with the [Council Plan](#) that enables members and officers to ensure policy initiatives can be planned for delivery within available resources and can be aligned to priority outcomes. It also enables the continued provision of value for money. Prior to being approved by Council, the MTFP13 underwent scrutiny and challenge by [Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board](#). In addition, the [Adults Wellbeing and Health OSC](#) and [Children and Young Peoples OSC](#) established working groups to identify potential efficiencies and income generation initiatives as part of the process.

52. Assurance over the delivery of the [Council Plan](#) and the [MTFP](#) is gained by detailed and frequent monitoring undertaken by Corporate Management Team (CMT). The drivers for the council's financial strategy, which were agreed by Cabinet on 28 June 2010 for MTFP1, and still underpin the strategy in MTFP13: -

- (a) set a balanced budget over the life of the MTFP whilst maintaining modest and sustainable increases in council tax;
- (b) fund agreed priorities, ensuring that service and financial planning are fully aligned with council plans;
- (c) deliver a programme of planned service reviews designed to keep reductions to front line service to a minimum;
- (d) strengthen the council's financial position so that it has sufficient reserves and balances to address any future risks and unforeseen events without jeopardising key services and delivery outcomes; and
- (e) ensure the council can continue to demonstrate value for money in the delivery of its priorities.

53. [Quarterly performance reports](#), which answer key performance questions rather than rely on performance indicators, have been aligned to the new [Council Plan](#) and [County Durham Vision 2035](#).

54. In November 2022, the Health and Wellbeing Board received a report on the [Better Care Fund Plan 2022-23 \(BCF\)](#). The BCF is one of the government's national initiatives for driving health and social care integration and requires

Clinical Commissioning Groups and local government to agree a joint plan for using pooled budgets to support integration.

55. In [June 2022](#), Cabinet considered a report, which provided an overview of the guidance and bidding requirements to access Round 2 of the Levelling Up Fund and sought approval for the submission of five proposals across County Durham for the parliamentary constituencies of City of Durham, Easington, North Durham, North West Durham and Sedgefield.
56. In [July 2022](#), Cabinet considered a report, which provided an update on the approach and progress made so far in the development of an Investment Plan for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and sought approval for the submission of the UKSPF Investment Plan for Durham.

Optimising achievement of intended outcomes

57. The Council has established a Shareholder Working Group comprising the Leader, Deputy Leader and relevant portfolio holders, the Chief Financial Officer and Monitoring Officer and Head of Finance to oversee performance and proposals in relation to the Council's companies. Shareholder decisions rest with Cabinet or the relevant Corporate Director in accordance with the Officer Scheme of Delegation within the Constitution. The Company Governance Group supports the work of the Shareholder Working Group with the oversight of the Council's companies' governance arrangements, including consideration of the strategic approach to, and structure of, its' companies and joint venture arrangements. The Group seeks to ensure that officers who work with, or who are appointed as, directors of Council companies understand their roles and responsibilities, identify and manage conflicts of interests, and provide resilience in the Council's resourcing of companies. Company governance training is included in the Council's Workforce Learning and Development Plan. Updates on the Group's work are periodically presented to the Corporate Management Team.
58. The following reports outline measures taken by the Council to optimise the achievement of outcomes included in the Council Plan: -
- (a) Climate Emergency Response Plan 2022-24 Update, [Health and Wellbeing Board, September 2022](#) (OUR ENVIRONMENT)
 - (b) Finance Durham – the First Five Years, [Cabinet, November 2022](#) (OUR ECONOMY)
 - (c) Humanitarian Support in County Durham, [Cabinet, October 2022](#) (OUR PEOPLE)
 - (d) Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24, [County Council, October 2022](#) (OUR ECONOMY)
 - (e) Scope 3 Emissions, [Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, May 2022](#) (OUR ENVIRONMENT)
 - (f) Supporting Solutions Update, [Corporate Parenting Panel, September 2022](#) (OUR PEOPLE)
 - (g) Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, [Corporate Parenting Panel, October 2022](#) (OUR PEOPLE)

Principle E: Developing the Council's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

Developing the Council's capacity

59. The Council's Digital Strategy seeks to enable flexible working through digital and mobile technology, make our workspaces more cost effective and productive, and support collaboration between teams across the organisation. Projects supporting these aims that have been completed during the last year include: -

- (a) The council's device replacement programme which ensures staff are equipped with the necessary technology to allow them to work virtually and in office, including access collaboration and communication applications, and the implementation of telephony software.
- (b) Mobile working projects to support employees in a range of front line and roles.

60. The [Digital Strategy](#) sets out the Council's digital ambitions for the County. It provides a framework within which these ambitions can be delivered and aligns to the interlocking objectives of the revised Council Vision. The strategy is set out under three main themes: Digital Customer; Digital Organisation; Digital Communities. Projects supporting delivery of Digital Strategy outcomes that have been completed in the last year include: -

(a) Digital Customer

- i. Website improvements: Accessibility, digital channel shift / Customer Relationship Management
- ii. Contact Centre: conversational AI (artificial intelligence), chatbots
- iii. Digital Durham: Better broadband programmes

(b) Digital Organisation

- i. Hybrid Working: Technology support, remote access projects
- ii. Service Desk: Incident management, self-service/self-help
- iii. Applications Review to establish direction for provision of major applications
- iv. Office 365: Expanded suite of productivity applications
- v. Hosting Review to set direction for provision of data centre, hosted and cloud services
- vi. Commercial Services Review to ensure services to external bodies are appropriate, profitable and sustainable
- vii. MTFP Financial review to set budgets and achieve efficiencies
- viii. Capital Schemes totalling over £4million to ensure that digital infrastructures remain fit for purpose

- ix. Cyber Security Framework to provide a blueprint and associated policies for the secure provision of ICT services.

(c) Digital Communities

- i. Digital Inclusion Strategy development
- ii. Support to Poverty Action Steering Group
- iii. Support to develop digital themes with the Inclusive Economic Strategy

61. The Community Assets Steering Group was re-established to develop a new policy and process to oversee new and existing asset transfers, which were previously managed under the Durham Ask programme.
62. Following a cyber self-assessment and analysis of our current position and market conditions, options for appropriate cyber insurance cover continue to be explored. Market conditions are currently unfavourable due to several recent global hacks and continued uncertainty following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Local authorities are regarded as high-risk with only a limited number of companies willing to provide insurance on a case-by-case basis, subject to a detailed assessment of our risks and mitigations. Costs have increased significantly, cover is limited if available, and insurance brokers have advised to invest the money that was earmarked for premiums in to improving defences. During the year, resilience was enhanced through a review of our current programme, the development of the Council's corporate [Cyber Security Strategy](#) and framework in addition to the delivery of a mandatory programme of cyber-security training and awareness for relevant employees. To further reduce the risk of a cyber-attack, our remote access policy was changed recently to reduce the number of countries from which staff can connect to DCC systems, applications and electronic resources. We continue to monitor and respond to the changing cyber-security landscape and emerging threats.
63. In December 2022, the Council received a report of the Chief Executive regarding the decision of the Chief Officer Appointments Committee to create a new Head of Service role, [Head of Corporate Affairs](#), which would report directly to the Chief Executive. The postholder will lead on the council's management of corporate affairs and provide support to the Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team to deliver the strategic priorities of the council. This new post includes responsibility for corporate communications and media as well as corporate strategy, planning and performance.
64. The following reports set out measures taken by the Council to develop the capabilities of members and senior management to enable a successful response to change and risks: -
- (a) Counter Terrorism - Prevent Awareness Session, [Safer and Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee, April 2022](#)
 - (b) Impact of the Education White Paper – Opportunity for all: Strong schools with great teachers, [Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, May 2022](#)

65. In October 2022, the Corporate Parenting Panel received a report, which provided information on the role of Independent Visitors (IV) who are trained volunteers who provide trusted and consistent relationships to children and young people looked after. At the end of August 2022 there had been 93 referrals to the service for a match, with 70 matches being made and 37 matches concluded. The service aims to meet the National Independent Visitor Service target of 10% of children in care being matched by June 2024. The service requires that students who volunteer must be able to commit to the role for at least one year and preferably two years in order to provide continuity.

Developing the capability of the Council's leadership and other individuals

66. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, supported by its five committees, makes decision-making processes transparent, accountable and inclusive and seeks to improve services for people by being responsive to their needs. Where appropriate, members have scrutinised the decisions of the Council, demonstrated by a number of key reviews and consultation responses both within the Council and with key partners, which are outlined in the [Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report](#) and the [Overview and Scrutiny Six-Monthly Update](#).

Examples include: -

- (a) The Inclusive Economic Strategy (E&E OSC¹)
- (b) Ecological Emergency Review and Declaration (ESC OSC²)
- (c) Leisure Transformation Programme (ESC OSC and E&E OSC)
- (d) Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP) (ESC OSC)
- (e) Durham County Council Allotments Policy (ESC OSC)
- (f) Library Transformation (ESC OSC)
- (g) Developing a new Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Strategy (CYP OSC³)
- (h) County Durham Children, Young People and Families Strategy (CYP OSC)
- (i) Contextualised Safeguarding (CYP OSC and SSC OSC⁴)
- (j) Safer Durham Partnership ASB Strategy (SSC OSC)
- (k) County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service Community Risk Management Plan
- (l) Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (AWH OSC⁵)
- (m) Access to Primary Care in County Durham (AWH OSC)
- (n) Quality Accounts for County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust; North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust and Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (AWH OSC)
- (o) Oral Health Strategy (AWH OSC)
- (p) Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (AWH OSC and CYP OSC).

67. A refresh of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board [work programme 2022/23](#) was agreed in June 2022.

¹ Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

² Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

³ Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

⁴ Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

⁵ Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

68. The Durham Learning and Development system hosts our Performance and Development Review scheme, which was launched for leaders, managers and core employees in 2019. The Durham Leadership Way programme outlines the expectations of leaders and managers together with a development and support offer. The Durham Leadership and Management Development Programme includes several mandatory courses, including coaching as a management style and mental health awareness for managers. Other courses are linked to corporate priorities, management skills and personal development. During 2022/23, managers attended mandatory training throughout the year to develop their skills as part of the corporate learning programme. Senior leadership development programmes were relaunched for Corporate Management Team, Extended Management Team and strategic managers.
69. Employees' needs, in terms of training, development, health and wellbeing, are delivered through our Workforce Strategy and the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy. Workforce Plans are being developed for all service areas to support current and future workforce challenges. In addition, the feedback and high-level results from the 2022 Working Well Survey will help inform key corporate actions and themes for the Council to address as well as service specific actions.
70. A revised Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy for 2022-2025 was introduced following consultation and agreement by Corporate Management Team in August 2022. The revised strategy now focuses on six key areas which are control, compliance, culture, cooperation, competence, and communication. A series of key milestones for each of the indicators has been attributed and will be implemented and monitored through the Corporate Health and Safety Group on a quarterly basis. The second employee working well survey was undertaken to collect information about the views of employees on workplace wellbeing issues. The Council also signed up to the workplace menopause pledge which supports the Menopause Workplace Pledge campaign. In doing so, the Council has committed to recognising that the menopause can be an issue in the workplace that needs support, talking openly, positively and respectfully about the menopause and actively supporting and informing employees affected.
71. The Council continues to support employees through the change process with, for example, confidential counselling services through the Employee Assistance Programme. A Wellbeing Portal has been specifically created for employees in relation to mental health and wellbeing and provides support and guidance for managers and non-management employees.
72. The Council achieved the Maintaining Excellence Better Health at Work Award and surveyed staff to inform future health and wellbeing campaigns.
73. The Council's [Apprenticeship Strategy 2022 - 2025](#) was approved by Cabinet in April 2022. Apprenticeship recruitment continues to support and grow our own approach to meet future skills requirements.
74. A report to Cabinet in June 2021 outlined a delegated decision taken by the Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services, to commission [Designated Settings](#) within care homes to provide a safe alternative for people who are temporarily unable to return to their usual place of residence due to their covid

status. This arrangement was extended for 2022/23, given the ongoing need to protect residents and uncertainty on Covid levels, but it is expected to be stood down for 2023/24.

75. The Council has a Member Development Programme, which provides training on specific roles (e.g., Chair, Vice-Chair, Committee positions) and responsibilities, and the opportunity to have an annual development conversation, which identifies personal learning and development opportunities. Members also have access to well-being support through the Employee Assistance Scheme. Where appropriate, risk assessments are completed for individual Members to reflect health and wellbeing needs or risks to their personal safety.
76. A portal on the Durham Learning and Development system brings together valuable resources and information for managers. Induction for new managers includes, mandatory training, links to policies, useful documentation and guidance, briefings and useful contacts.
77. Following the cessation of Covid Plan B measures in February 2022, a hybrid working model continues to operate, which minimises the potential number of employees in the workplace at any one time, whilst also supporting our future direction of travel to work more flexibly and smarter as an organisation.

Principle F: Managing risks, data and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

Managing risk

78. Risk management continues to be embedded in decision making and key business processes and the [Risk Management Policy and Strategy](#), which defines key roles and responsibilities and is reviewed annually, underpins this. The Audit Committee has gained assurance that the Council's strategic risks are being effectively managed through reports issued in [September 2022](#), [November 2022](#) and [February 2023](#). In September 2022, the Council received a report from the [Report of the Audit Committee](#) on its work between September 2021 and August 2022, and how the Committee continues to provide for good governance across the Council.
79. The Council is jointly responsible for responding to civil emergencies (such as severe weather events, network power losses and the Covid-19 pandemic) through the County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum. The [strategic risk management progress report](#) to Audit Committee in February 2023 gave an account of work by the Council and its' partners to scale up preparedness for, and protection from, a potential terrorist attack and to ensure that the council will be able to meet the new requirements of Martyn's Law, which follows campaigning after the Manchester Arena terror attack in May 2017 and is expected to come into force in August 2023.
80. The Pension Fund Committee has gained assurance that pension fund risks are being effectively managed through a report issued in [June 2022](#).

81. The Council's insurance policy has been enhanced to provide additional cover for third party computer fraud and network security. The Corporate Insurance Team is working to ensure that the Tree Management Policy meets the requirements of the insurance policy. Insurance-related challenges include increasing costs of cover linked to inflation and projected property portfolio increases of 20%.
82. Several challenges and uncertainties lie ahead, and these are being monitored through the Council's strategic risk management reporting arrangements: -
- (a) The financial outlook for the council and the whole of local government remains extremely challenging.
 - (b) Capacity issues caused by nationwide labour shortages.
 - (c) Funding pressures in adult social care.
 - (d) The Council's role as a community leader, to help partners, local businesses and communities make the necessary adaptations and mitigations in pursuit of the target of being a carbon-neutral County by 2050 (climate change).
 - (e) Potential disruption to the Council's and partners' urgent and emergency care services due to backlogs caused by Covid, increased demand and staff capacity issues.
 - (f) Inability to recruit and retain children's social workers and social work managers may seriously inhibit the delivery of services.

Managing performance

83. The [County Durham Partnership](#), which is the strategic partnership for the County, is made up of key public, private and voluntary sector partners. Its' role includes monitoring performance towards implementing [County Durham Vision 2035](#), and considering strategically how plans align and where efficiencies and value can be maximised through integration, shared services and joint commissioning.
84. The Council's Cabinet is responsible for monitoring performance and ensures that effective arrangements are put in place to deal with any failures in service delivery. Assurance is gained through [quarterly performance reporting](#) and through performance clinics between the Chief Executive and Corporate Directors during the year.
85. To manage and measure service improvement, the Council has a locally led planning and performance management framework that links to the [County Durham Vision 2035](#) and the [Council Plan](#). The format of performance reports has been realigned to the ambitions in the new Council vision. We are developing online (near) real-time performance dashboards using business intelligence and reporting services tools to provide more immediate views and visualisations of performance as part of a business intelligence programme.
86. The Quality Improvement Board is chaired by the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services and meets monthly to provide strategic oversight and lead improvements in quality.

87. The Police and Crime Panel, which includes councillors from Durham County Council and from Darlington Borough Council, scrutinises the [annual report](#), decisions and actions of the Police and Crime Commissioner.
88. Risk management and internal control are acknowledged as integral parts of the Council's performance management framework and crucial to the achievement of objectives. To reflect this, internal audit continuously reviews risks with reference to strategic objectives, and a register of strategic risks is compiled linking each item to the relevant strategic objective. Internal audit progress updates were provided to Audit Committee in [May 2022](#), [September 2022](#), [November 2022](#) and [February 2023](#).

Robust internal control

89. The Internal Audit service has continued to face ongoing recruitment and retention challenges throughout 2022/23 year which impacted on the delivery of the overall plan. As such, the service regularly reviewed the content of the plan to ensure that the work carried out was prioritised on a risk basis and to ensure that all key financial systems and high-risk areas of activity are reviewed on an annual basis. The recruitment and retention challenges resulted in changes being made to the service structure taking place in January 2023.
90. Revised versions of the [Internal Audit Strategy, Charter and Plan 2022/23](#) were approved by Audit Committee in May 2022.
91. The Council's [Counter Fraud & Corruption Strategy](#) and companion documents, the Fraud Response Plan, Sanctions Policy, Confidential Reporting Code (Whistleblowing) and the [Anti-Money Laundering Policy](#) have all been reviewed and presented to Audit Committee in 2021/2022. A comprehensive communications and awareness plan to help launch these is planned throughout 2023.
92. The Corporate Fraud Team received Cabinet Office approval to progress a Northeast Fraud Hub Pilot with Gateshead and Newcastle Councils. The Hub uses Part 5 of the Digital Economy Act to share data and fraud intelligence to increase our capability to uncover potential and actual fraud across the region. The Cabinet Office have acknowledged that it would be beneficial for as many local authorities to be part of the Hub and have suggested that if the pilot is successful then the concept could be used nationally as a model of best practice.

Managing data

93. The designated Senior Information Risk Officer is the Corporate Director of Resources, and the designated Data Protection Officer is the Strategic Manager, Executive Support. Information governance and data management continues to be maintained through the [Data Protection Policy](#), the Data Quality Policy, records management guidance for staff, registers of data assets, and various data sharing protocols. Developments planned for 2023/24 will be overseen by an Information Governance Group and include a new improvement programme linked to the council's use of data, reviews of performance and resource requirements, and a series of business process reviews.
94. A mandatory data protection e-learning training module was issued in 2021/22 for completion by all relevant employees. A mandatory freedom of information awareness e-learning training module is available for completion by all relevant employees.

Strong public financial management

95. The Council has appointed the Corporate Director of Resources as Chief Financial Officer and Section 151 Officer (Local Government Act 1972) to fulfil the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2016). The Chief Financial Officer, who is a member of the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and reports directly to the Chief Executive, has been involved in all CMT discussions, and has reviewed all reports to Cabinet which have financial implications.
96. The Government's responses to the recommendations made in the [Redmond review](#) into the oversight of local audit and the transparency of local authority financial reporting are reported regularly to Members of the Audit Committee.
97. The following reports provide assurance that the Council's financial management supports both long-term achievement of outcomes and short-term financial and operational performance: -
- (a) [Update on Progress towards achieving MTFP \(12\) savings](#)
 - (b) [Mid-Year Review Report on Treasury Management for the period to 30 September 2022](#)
 - (c) [Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2022/23](#)
 - (d) [Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2022/23 – Period to 31 December 2022 and Update on Progress towards achieving MTFP \(12\) savings](#)
 - (e) [Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2026/27 and Revenue Budget 2023/24](#)
 - (f) [Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2026/27 and Revenue and Capital Budget 2023/24](#)
98. Following the Government's publication in May 2022 of [statutory guidance](#) in relation to special severance payments, the Council's decision-making process for authorising such payments was reviewed and updated to ensure that the

Council complies with the statutory guidance. The changes will be reflected in the annual review of the Constitution being considered by the Council in May 2023.

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

Implementing good practice in transparency

99. The Council is committed to being open and transparent about how it works and how decisions are made. In line with the Local Government Transparency Code, information is published on a [transparency and accountability web page](#) about how money is spent, how services are purchased, land and assets owned, structures and salaries, and fraud. As required by law, the sum paid to each county councillor is also published. The Council has also been publishing open datasets through the Data Mill North website.
100. Reports about complaints against members are included in part A of the Standards Committee agenda rather than part B (consideration of exempt or confidential information). The Committee receives a quarterly report on national issues relating to ethical governance relevant to the work of the Committee and considers whether to make recommendations in response so that the Council maintains best practice and learns lessons from experiences elsewhere.

Implementing good practices in reporting

101. The Council's commitment to regular reporting to stakeholders on performance, value for money and stewardship of resources is evidenced throughout this statement. Other examples of reports to relevant committees include: -
- (a) [Annual Performance Update](#) (Health and Wellbeing Board, July 2022)
 - (b) [Annual Report of Durham County Council's Fostering Service](#) (Corporate Parenting Panel, September 2022)
 - (c) [Annual Report on the Adoption Service 2021/2022](#) (Corporate Parenting Panel, December 2022)
 - (d) [Annual Summary Report of the Children Looked After Strategic Partnership \(Corporate Parenting Panel, December 2022\)](#)
 - (e) [Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2021-22](#) (County Council, September 2022)
 - (f) [County Durham Plan Annual Monitoring Report 2021/22](#) (Cabinet, December 2022)
 - (g) [Director of Public Health Annual Report 2022](#) (County Council, December 2022)
 - (h) [Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group Annual Report 2021/22](#) (Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, November 2022)
 - (i) [Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership Annual Report 2021/22](#) (Health and Wellbeing Board, January 2023)

- (j) [Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2020/21](#) (Health and Wellbeing Board, January 2023)
 - (k) [Health and Wellbeing Board Annual Report 2021/22](#) (Cabinet, October 2022)
 - (l) [Health Protection Assurance Annual Report](#) (Cabinet, May 2022)
 - (m) [Virtual School Annual Report Summary](#) (Corporate Parenting Panel, January 2023)
102. The [Local Code of Corporate Governance](#) is reviewed annually before being considered for approval by the Audit Committee and County Council.
103. The [Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2022](#), incorporating the [Annual Governance Statement for 2021/22](#), was approved by the Audit Committee in November 2022, taking account of the views of the External Auditor, in line with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. External Audit also provides an independent opinion on whether the Annual Governance Statement is materially accurate.
104. In February 2023, the External Auditor presented Audit Committee with the [Audit Planning Update and Progress Report](#), which covered the 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 audits. The report notes that the Council's 2021/22 opinion was successfully delivered by the publishing date despite uncertainties concerning the valuation of infrastructure assets, and significant ongoing challenges of recruiting and retaining sufficient staff with the requisite knowledge, skills and experience to both prepare and audit the accounts to the required standard.
105. The Council endeavours to publish financial statements in a timely manner and in accordance with financial reporting standards. Examples include: -
- (a) [Compliance with CIPFA Financial Management Code](#)
 - (b) [Consideration of 'Going Concern Status' for the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2022](#)
 - (c) [Audit Completion Report 2021/220/21 - Pension Fund](#)
 - (d) [Treasury Management Final Outturn 2021/22](#)
 - (e) [Final Outturn for the General Fund and Collection Fund 2021/22](#)
 - (f) [Changes to the Code of Practice for Local Authority Accounting in the UK for 2022/23](#)
 - (g) [Agreement of Accounting Policies for Application in the 2022/23 Financial Statements](#)
 - (h) [Budget 2023/24 – Report under Section 25 of Local Government Act 2003](#)
106. In February 2023, Audit Committee was provided with a summary of the key accounting changes in the latest edition of the Code of Practice for Local Authority Accounting in the UK (item f, above). The report highlighted a mid-year update to the Code, due to exceptional circumstances, by the CIPFA/LASAAC Code Board, which is overseen by the Financial Reporting Advisory Board. The amendment relaxed the reporting requirements for infrastructure assets temporarily, until the 2024/25 financial year. The Council has chosen to apply this relief and, as required by the Code, will provide the rationale for this decision in the Statement of Accounts.

107. Durham County Council Pension Fund (the Fund) is part of the Local Government Pension Scheme governed by regulations made under the Public Service Pensions Act 2013 and administered by Durham County Council. The Pension Fund Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2021, which contains the Pension Fund audited statement of accounts, was authorised by the responsible financial officer on 30 September 2021 and published on the council's website on 28 October 2021. The [Pension Fund Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2022](#) were received by the Pension Fund Committee in December 2022. The Pension Fund's [Annual Report](#) includes a Governance Compliance Statement which sets out the Fund's scheme of delegation and the terms of reference, structure and operational procedures of the delegation, and the extent of its compliance with 2008 statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State and the provisions of regulation 55 of the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013.

Assurance and effective accountability

108. A review of the effectiveness of Internal Audit, incorporating the Internal Audit Service and the Audit Committee, has been undertaken and was reported to the Audit Committee in July 2023. This review concluded that the Council's system of internal audit is considered to be effective, which in turn allows the opinion of the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager to be relied upon.

109. In May 2019, Audit Committee approved revised [Terms of Reference](#) incorporating the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's model Terms of Reference defined in the Practical Guidance for Local Authorities 2018. The Committee also completed a core knowledge and [self-assessment](#) against the good practice for Audit Committees in Local Authorities guidance, and no significant gaps were identified.

110. An external quality assessment of the Internal Audit Service's conformance to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and the CIPFA* Local Government Application Note during 2021/22 was carried out by CIPFA. The opinion delivered concluded that the Internal Audit Service fully conforms to the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the CIPFA Local Government Application Note. Some improvement opportunities have been identified and an action plan has been developed to address these.

* Chartered Institute of Public and Finance and Accountancy.

111. Assurance can also be taken from the following external independent sources that, through good governance, the Council continues to maintain and improve the quality of services: -

- (a) The [Audit Completion Report 2021/22 - Durham County Council](#) summarises the external auditor's conclusions for the year ended 31 March 2022.
- (b) External Audit Progress reports in [September 2022](#) and [February 2023](#).
- (c) The [Audit Completion Report 2021/22 - Pension Fund](#) summarises the external auditor's conclusions for the year ended 31 March 2022.

112. Regulatory inspections

- (a) Each Children's home is inspected by the regulator, Ofsted - [Regulation 44 Visits and Regulatory Body Ratings of Children's Residential Homes](#).
- (b) [Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services Update](#).
- (c) [The Approach to Wellbeing Recommendations arising from the final evaluation](#).

APPENDIX B: Update on improvements identified in the 2021/22 Annual Governance Statement

Following the production of the Annual Governance Statement for 2021/22, seven improvement actions were identified for 2022/23. Progress against each action is shown in the table below.

No.	Actions to be taken	Links to the Local Code of Corporate Governance (ref)	Lead Officer	Timescale	Update
1	Brought forward Implement the actions identified in the Children's Social Care Services improvement plan agreed with Ofsted.	The Council welcomes peer challenge, reviews and inspections from regulatory bodies and seeks to ensure that recommendations are implemented (4.67).	Head of Children's Social Care	March 2023	<p>The action is complete.</p> <p>We have clarified the response required and reported this to Ofsted as part of our Action Plan. All actions identified in the improvement plan have been completed or incorporated into the new Improvement Plan being developed by Children and Young Peoples Services in response to the most recent ILACS Inspection in May 2022, when the Council was judged to be 'good' for overall effectiveness with 'outstanding' leadership.</p> <p>The actions are being progressed by CYPS and Commissioning Teams with regular updates on progress, which show improvements have been and continue to be made.</p>
2	Brought forward Review the approach to residential and nursing care, taking into account market reshaping required as a result of capacity in the market, the Covid-19 pandemic and changing preferences in terms of care, with the aim of ensuring a	D3.1 Optimise the achievement of outcomes (4.34)	Head of Integrated Commissioning	March 2023	<p>This action has been carried forward to 2023/24 with a revised timescale of March 2025.</p> <p>The Government announced a far-reaching reform of social care funding in Spring 2022. Following the update provided on this action in May 2022, full details were received by local authorities (LAs). The reforms set out changes to the way individuals pay for care, i.e., the 'care cap', and linked initiatives to move towards a Fair Cost of Care (FCOC) for older persons care homes. LAs were required to carry out cost exercises with their local markets using set national parameters and provide both these and a detailed Market Sustainability Plan (MSP) to the Department of Health & Social</p>

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	sustainable and high-quality care market.				<p>Care (DHSC). However, the 2022 Autumn Statement both delayed the charging reforms to late 2025 and reprofiled national funding allocated to LAs for those markets in scope for FCOC and wider adult and children's social care services. DCC completed and submitted FCOC market exercises in Autumn 2022 and a comprehensive MSP in March 2023, as required by DHSC. In terms of sustainability issues, these national requirements effectively cover the same areas of the planned review we had already anticipated carrying out; therefore, a decision was made to avoid duplication and concentrate fully on the FCOC exercise and MSP. These are now complete. Integrated Commissioning have also completed modelling on care home activity and housing stock as part of the above work.</p> <p>Commissioners have also recently successfully negotiated a two-year fee uplift agreement with local older persons care homes, following an extended period where contracts had not been signed. As part of this agreement, it has been agreed with the market that the Council will build on the successful FCOC and MSP work locally to take forward further market shaping during 2023-24 and 2024-25.</p>
3	<p>Brought forward</p> <p>Deliver the actions set out within the Looked After Children Placement Sufficiency Strategy to ensure best outcomes and cost-effective placement costs to address escalating budget</p>	<p>Developing the Council's capacity: improve the use of resources to ensure that they are allocated in a way that realises</p>	<p>Head of Children's Social Care and Head of Integrated Commissioning</p>	<p>March 2023</p>	<p>The action plan is substantially complete and four remaining actions of the original 26 have been incorporated into a new strategy.</p> <p>The Looked After Children Placement Sufficiency Strategy action plan has been superseded by the new Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2022-2024, which was approved by Cabinet in January 2023.</p>

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	pressures within Children's Social Care.	outcomes effectively and efficiently (4.38)			<p>The original plan contained 26 actions over a three-year period (2020-2023), each aligned to one of four objectives relating to in-house foster carers (9), adopters (2), residential homes (11) and care leavers (4). As of 31 March 2023, 18 actions were complete, six were incorporated into the new strategy, and two have been removed as they are no longer considered fit for purpose. The new strategy includes two new objectives, Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Short breaks.</p> <p>During 2022/23, the Fostering Service recruited 11 new foster carer households, against a target of 35. When taking into account the number of foster carer de-registrations (30) there has been a loss of 19 foster carer households during the year, in comparison with 29 households (net) recruited during 2021/22. The reduction in the number of foster carers recruited is due to a number of aspects, including operating in a highly competitive market with Independent Fostering Agencies, the cost-of-living crisis and the loss of a Marketing Officer that worked within the Fostering Team who directly managed advertising campaigns and provided additional capacity. The marketing and recruitment campaign continues to focus on sibling groups, children with a disability, teenagers and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Work is ongoing to develop a new website which provides a 'one-stop-shop' for prospective foster carers and it is anticipated that this will be live later in the year. The Mockingbird Model has launched its first set of hub carers during the year, which has enhanced support to foster carers and improved the stability of children's foster homes. A second hub is due to be rolled out over the next 3 months. The Payment for Skills Review has been concluded, which seeks to improve our sufficiency of foster carers through the review of payments and incentives to carers. This will be launched in April 2023. Durham continues</p>

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					<p>to work regionally as part of Tyne Tees Independent Fostering Agency Solution, with the contract opened on a monthly basis, to enable new IFAs to join.</p> <p>The Adopt Coast to Coast Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) continues to operate across the Durham, Sunderland and Cumbria area, however from April 2023 Cumbria will move away from the arrangement. The practice around early linking and matching continues to be monitored to ensure children do not wait longer than necessary. There is evidence that Link Maker is enabling matches across the spokes. The number of prospective adoptive households approved by the Durham spoke remains good. Adoption approvals in 2022/23 are 38 in comparison with 40 in 2021/22.</p> <p>During 2022/23 we have continued to make good progress in the development of new smaller children's residential homes. A home for one child / young person has been established (Hudson House - Coxhoe) which is currently going through a registration process with Ofsted. We are in the process of opening another children's home which will accommodate up to two children / young people (Elderhurst – Meadowfield). This home has been subject to an extensive refurbishment programme which has now been completed and is due to open over the next two months. We continue to progress with the development of an Edge of Care home in Seaham. The purchase price has been agreed and the fire service have agreed the sale of the building. Following a change of planning use, it is anticipated that the new home will open later in 2023. DfE funding of £256,020 has also been secured to support the development costs of this new home. A number of different properties had been previously identified for the re-provided home (Tow Law), but unfortunately offers had to be withdrawn</p>

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					<p>due to complications encountered i.e. issues identified in the survey, challenge from members or the police. A property has since been identified which we will purchase over the coming weeks. This property will provide a home for up to two children / young people (Lincoln House – Castleside), which we aim to open later in the financial year. We are working in partnership with the registered social landlord, Livin Homes, to develop a short-term / emergency home for one young person. A property has been identified and a lease is being developed. It is anticipated that the home will open later in 2023.</p> <p>Recommendations from the Children’s Home LEAN Review (which considered the end-to-end process of setting up homes) were approved at CMT and Cabinet. This resulted in the delegated limit for children’s home property purchases being increased to £500K, enabling the Council to purchase properties without a change of planning use in place (subject to due diligence) and sets out a clear process for developing children’s homes with all supporting teams/services clear about the importance of the new homes and the need to prioritise this area of work (where possible).</p> <p>The Staying Close Pilot Programme was rolled out during 2022/23 using funding secured from the DfE and to date has supported four young people. The Staying Close Programme focuses on our young people in children’s home provision, providing ongoing, consistent, familiar support from their residential staff, when they leave their children’s home as care leavers. The programme aims to deliver a series of improved outcomes for young people, including, accommodation stability, reduction in eviction, improved emotional wellbeing and mental health. Young people who will be supported through year 2 are being considered.</p>

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					<p>In relation to care leavers, the Supported Living Preferred Provider Panel has been recommissioned for a further 12 months, until September 2023, when we will then consider the new regulatory framework for supported accommodation providers prior to recommissioning. We will work closely with providers to prepare them and to understand any emerging gaps within the provider marketplace. We meet frequently with supported accommodation providers as part of a provider engagement forum. One action, <i>review the marketing and recruitment strategy for supported lodging provision</i>, has been re-profiled to June 2023. Additional capacity is now in place to drive this work forward.</p>

No.	Actions to be taken	Links to the Local Code of Corporate Governance (ref)	Lead Officer	Timescale	Update
4	Change our social care model and ensure that people have access to robust advice and information to enable them to live healthy and independent lives in their community and to prevent delaying the need for formal service provision (Our People)	Engaging with individual citizens and service users effectively: effective communication methods to collect and evaluate the views, experiences and future needs (4.23)	Head of Adult Care	2022	<p>This action is complete.</p> <p>Our 'front of house' service remains highly effective at signposting and re-directing people to available support in their community. 35% of all calls are resolved without the need for a formal referral for full assessment.</p> <p>Following completion of baseline review, a project is now being developed to take forward the recommendations to consolidate our Locate and FIS directories and review the supporting governance to ensure we have vibrant and community focused assets.</p> <p>Our locality social work teams have strengthened links with the Wellbeing for Life service and Health Facilitators work as part of a network of Community Connectors to advise and signpost people to use the assets available in their local communities.</p> <p>Integrated Commissioning Service have also developed an Integrated Involvement Strategy which includes our shared vision for integration, involvement, and co-production. Working with the North East regional ADASS People with Lived Experience Group, we are developing more effective methods of engaging with users of our services and our citizens to ensure that their experiences shape our service improvement work.</p>

No.	Actions to be taken	Links to the Local Code of Corporate Governance (ref)	Lead Officer	Timescale	Update
5	Review of the Council's community engagement functions, including the work of area action partnerships (Our Communities)	Engaging with institutional stakeholders: engage & develop formal/informal partnerships to ensure that the purpose, objectives & intended relationship outcomes are clear (4.21)	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement	2023	<p>The action is complete.</p> <p>Independent consultants ERS have completed a review of the Council's community engagement functions including engagement and consultation with staff, elected members and key partners. The final report, including findings and recommendations, was reported to Community Engagement Review Steering Group on 10th January 2023.</p> <p>A consultation period will now take place, followed by a report to Cabinet in June 2023 to propose a way forward, including any potential changes to the organisational structure and service delivery model.</p>
6	Implement a new performance management framework for Adult and Health Services, to enable more timely analysis of data, improved business intelligence and real time presentation of data (Our Council)	Managing performance: service delivery is effectively monitored (4.52)	Head of Adult Care	2022	<p>This action is complete.</p> <p>The new Adult and Health Services performance management framework has been in place since Spring 2022. This involves bi-monthly cycles of performance clinics with operational teams and strategic managers, Head of Adult and Social Care, the Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services and Corporate Management Team. Throughout these cycles, performance is discussed within the context of demand, complexity and other pressures and significant issues are escalated for oversight, assurance and support. The rollout is complete and will be reviewed and refreshed regularly as the Care Quality Commission inspection framework emerges and wider health and social care integration takes place.</p>

No.	Actions to be taken	Links to the Local Code of Corporate Governance (ref)	Lead Officer	Timescale	Update
7	Undertake a corporate peer challenge with the Local Government Association to help us identify strengths and areas for improvement within the council (Our Council)	Assurance and effective accountability: welcome peer challenge, reviews & inspections from regulatory bodies and ensure that recommendations are implemented (4.67)	Head of Corporate Affairs	December, 2023	<p>This action is postponed.</p> <p>A corporate peer challenge working group had been established and some work undertaken to prepare for a Peer Review, with meetings having been held with the lead officer from the Local Government Association. The corporate peer challenge was scheduled to take place in February 2023 but has now been postponed due to the work underway to plan for savings should the Councils current MTFP projections prove correct, given the uncertainty surrounding local government funding and the implications for the Council. It is intended to defer undertaking the peer challenge at this stage and discussions are underway to find a mutually convenient time for the Council and the LGA to undertake the review.</p>

APPENDIX C: Proposed Governance Improvements required during 2023/24

As a result of the review of governance arrangements, and the work of both internal and external audit, eleven improvement actions have been identified to further strengthen governance arrangements in 2023/24. These are shown in the table below.

No.	Action	Links to the Local Code of Corporate Governance (ref)	Lead Officer	Timescale
1	Brought forward Review the approach to residential and nursing care, taking into account market reshaping required as a result of capacity in the market, the Covid-19 pandemic and changing preferences in terms of care, with the aim of ensuring a sustainable and high-quality care market.	Optimising achievement of intended outcomes: optimise the achievement of outcomes (4.34)	Head of Integrated Commissioning	March 2025
2	Develop a new corporate cyber recovery plan for key digital services with prioritised recovery targets and business continuity plans to further strengthen the Council's resilience to a successful cyber-attack.	Developing the Council's capacity: ensures the continuing effectiveness of its operations, performance, and use of assets (4.37)	Head of Digital Services	December 2024
3	Implement our Poverty Strategy and Action Plan to help protect residents most at risk of poverty and exclusion, increase equality of opportunity and ensure fewer people are affected by poverty and deprivation (Our Economy).	Sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits: ensure fair treatment and fair access to services and opportunities (4.29)	Head of Transactional and Customer Services	March 2026

No.	Action	Links to the Local Code of Corporate Governance (ref)	Lead Officer	Timescale
4	Deliver Actions from the Growing up in County Durham Strategy 2023-25, including working with the strengths and opportunities in local communities to develop a network of family hubs which can support the delivery of a range of local community support and services to children, young people and families (Our People).	Planning interventions: arrangements for planning the interventions for the achievement of intended outcomes (4.33)	Corporate Director Children and Young Peoples Services	March 2025
5	Through the Health, Safety and Wellbeing (HSW) Strategy, deliver the HSW programme to support the development of a positive culture and to ensure that our employees and those who may be affected by what we do, go home safe and well every day.	Developing the capability of the Council's leadership and others: maintain effective arrangements to meet employees' needs of training, development, health, and wellbeing (4.46)	Head of Corporate Property and Land	March 2024
6	Develop a digital skills programme and invest in smarter working (Our Council).	Developing the Council's capacity: improve the management of resources to ensure that they are allocated and utilised in a way that realises outcomes effectively and efficiently (4.38)	Head of Digital Services / Head of Human Resources & Employee Services	March 2024
7	Develop & implement the Workforce Development Offer and programmes for 2023/24, including utilising opportunities to upskill the workforce.	Developing the Council's capacity: maintain an effective workforce plan, through the Workforce Strategy, to enhance the strategic allocation of resources (4.39)	Head of Human Resources & Employee Services	March 2024

No.	Action	Links to the Local Code of Corporate Governance (ref)	Lead Officer	Timescale
8	Increase self-service of management and performance data by developing a range of business intelligence products (Our Council).	Developing the Council's capacity: improve the management of resources to ensure that they are allocated and utilised in a way that realises outcomes effectively and efficiently (4.38)	Head of Corporate Affairs	March 2024
9	Implement the Council's response to the Community Engagement and Funding processes review (Our Council).	Engaging with institutional stakeholders: engage & develop formal/informal partnerships to ensure that the purpose, objectives & intended relationship outcomes are clear (4.21)	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement	March 2024
10	Further strengthen the alignment of the processes for service planning, financial planning, performance management and service development to deliver increased value for money.	Planning interventions: arrangements for planning the interventions for the achievement of its intended outcomes (4.33)	Head of Corporate Affairs	March 2024
11	Review and refresh the DCC Workforce Strategy	Developing the Council's capacity: maintain an effective workforce plan, through the Workforce Strategy, to enhance the strategic allocation of resources (4.39)	Head of Human Resources & Employee Services	March 2024