

REPORT TO: Business Efficiency Board
DATE: 29 June 2011
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Policy & Resources
SUBJECT: Annual Governance Statement 2010/11
WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to enable Members of the Board to consider and approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2010/11.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION:

The Board is recommended to review and approve the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background to the Annual Governance Statement

- 3.1 Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011 the Council must produce an Annual Governance Statement (AGS), in a format recommended by CIPFA/SOLACE, to accompany the Statement of Accounts. This is a change from previous years where the AGS was an integral part of the Statement of Accounts. This change is to emphasise that the AGS is separate from the accounts for the purpose of external audit.
- 3.2 The AGS is intended to identify any areas where the Council's governance arrangements are not in line with best practice or are not working effectively, together with action plans for improvement.
- 3.3 The Council Constitution delegates the responsibility to review and approve the AGS to the Business Efficiency Board. Once approved, the AGS is signed by the Council Leader and Chief Executive and published on the Council's website.
- 3.4 CIPFA advise that the AGS should be drafted in order for it to accompany the signed and dated Statement of Accounts by the end of June.

Preparation of the 2010/11 Annual Governance Statement

- 3.5 The production of the AGS has been co-ordinated through a Corporate Governance Group led by the Strategic Director – Policy & Resources.

This group has been responsible for evaluating the sources of assurance and identifying any areas where the Council's governance arrangements could be strengthened. A flowchart summarising the process followed in preparing the AGS is shown in Appendix 1.

- 3.6 In preparing the AGS, assurances have been considered from a number of sources, including:
- The progress made in responding to issues identified in the 2009/10 AGS;
 - Issues raised by the Audit Commission in its role as external auditor;
 - Inspection reports from other independent bodies;
 - The Council's risk and performance management frameworks;
 - The work undertaken by internal audit;
 - The work of the Information Management Group.

Outcome of the review of the Council's governance arrangements

- 3.7 The issues identified in the 2009/10 AGS have been addressed as follows:
- The Council's governance and internal control framework has been adequately maintained despite the significant budgetary pressures and funding constraints experienced. The Audit Commission's Annual Governance Report from September 2010 stated that the 2009/10 financial statements audit 'has not identified any material weaknesses in internal control'. Similarly the work of internal audit continues to provide assurance that the Council's risk management, control and governance processes are generally effective.
 - IT business continuity arrangements have been further developed:
 - A business impact review has been undertaken to assess the impact as well as the likelihood of failure of key business and IT systems.
 - Business Continuity Plans (BCP) detailing the procedures to allow recovery from a partial or total loss of IT and business services in a controlled manner are being reviewed and updated.
 - The Council has a contract in place for the provision of standby ICT facilities.
 - Business continuity requirements are now routinely considered during the development and specification of new computer applications.
 - Section 64 and Schedule 4 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 required all local authorities to adopt one of two new governance models – either a 'new style' Leader and

Cabinet Executive or a Mayor and Cabinet Executive. Following a formal public consultation process, the Council at its meeting on 15 December resolved that the Leader with Cabinet model of governance be adopted, with effect from the third day after the ordinary election of Councillors in May 2011.

3.8 No further significant governance issues have been identified through the 2010/11 review of the Council's governance framework that require disclosure in the AGS.

3.9 The draft AGS for 2010/11 is attached at Appendix 2.

4.0 POLICY, FINANCIAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011 include a statutory requirement to prepare a statement on internal control in accordance with 'proper practice'. Proper practice is defined by the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework as an Annual Governance Statement.

4.2 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Good governance leads to good management, good performance and good stewardship of public money. It therefore enables the Council to implement its vision in accordance with its values and to engage effectively with its citizens and service users and ensure good outcomes for them.

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

See 5.1 above.

5.3 A Healthy Halton

See 5.1 above.

5.4 A Safer Halton

See 5.1 above.

5.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

See 5.1 above.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 6.1 Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011 the Council is legally required to 'conduct a review at least once a year of the effectiveness of its system of internal control'. Following the review, the Council must approve an annual governance statement, prepared in accordance with proper practices in relation to internal control.
- 6.2 The processes followed in reviewing the system of internal control aim to ensure that an accurate statement can be produced in line with the requirements of the Act. Part of the review process includes consultation with the Business Efficiency Board, which is responsible for ensuring that the Council's governance arrangements comply with best practice.

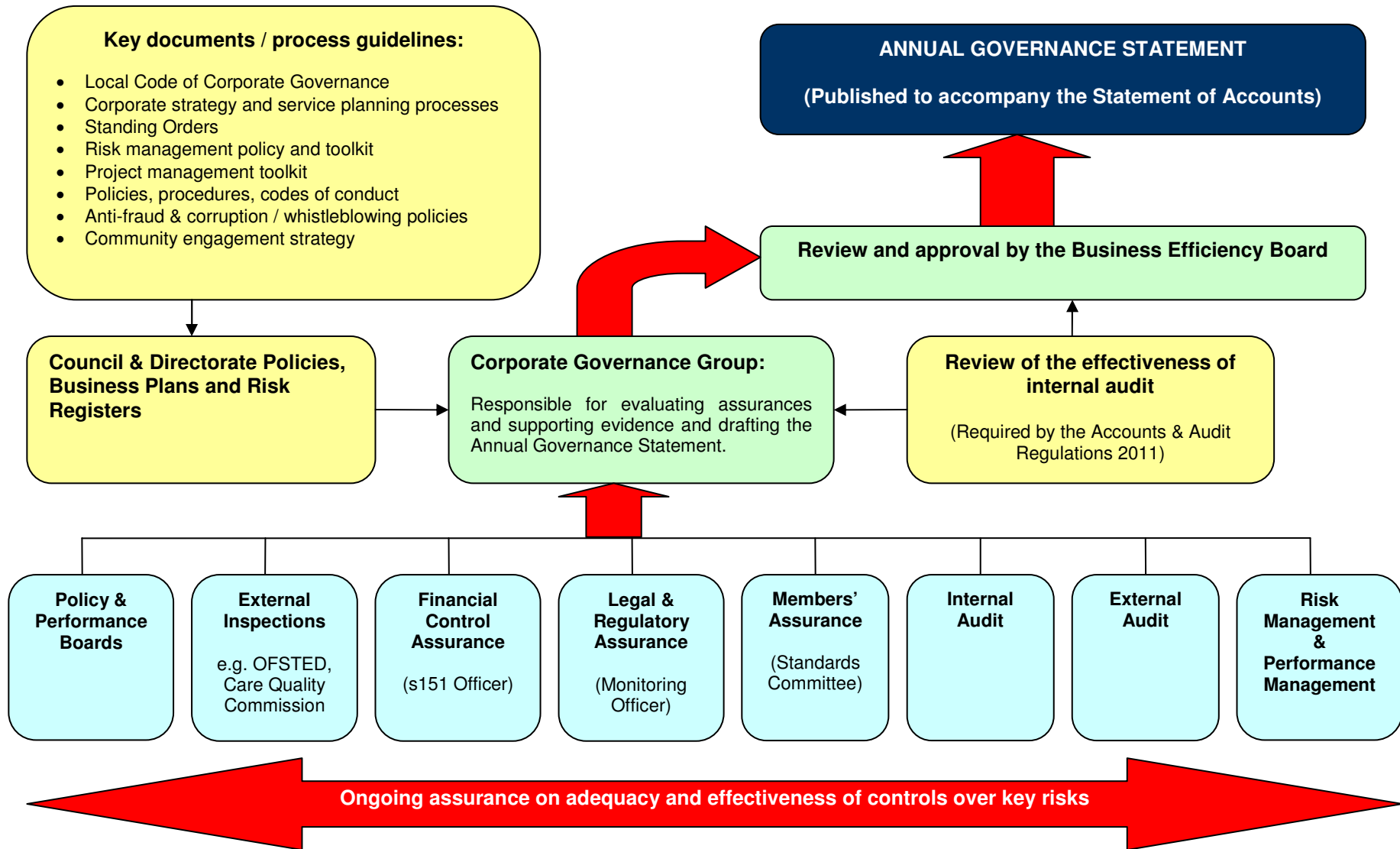
7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 7.1 There are no direct equality and diversity issues arising from this report.

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact
CIPFA / SOLACE – Delivering good governance in Local Government: Framework (2007)	Kingsway House, Widnes	Merv Murphy
CIPFA / SOLACE - Delivering good governance in Local Government: Guidance note for English authorities (2007)		
The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011		

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT – ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK



ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

for the year ended 31 March 2011

1. Scope of Responsibility

- 1.1 Halton Borough Council is responsible for ensuring that:
- its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards;
 - public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for; and
 - public money is used economically, efficiently and effectively.
- 1.2 Halton Borough 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.
- 1.3 In discharging this overall responsibility, Halton Borough 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.
- 1.4 The Council has adopted a 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 and Senior Managers (SOLACE) Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*.
- 1.5 This statement explains how Halton Borough Council has complied with the principles of good governance and reviews the effectiveness of these arrangements. It also meets the requirements of regulation 4(2) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 as amended by the Accounts and Audit (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2006 in relation to the publication of a statement on internal control.

2. The Purpose of the Governance Framework

- 2.1 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values by which the authority is directed and controlled, and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost effective services.
- 2.2 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 Halton Borough Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.
- 2.3 The governance framework has been in place at Halton Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2011 and up to the date of approval of the statement of accounts.

3. The Council's Governance Framework

The key elements and processes that comprise the Council's governance framework are described below. Documents referred to may be viewed on the Council's website and are available from the Council on request.

3.1 Communicating the Council's vision

- a) The long-term vision for Halton is set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Council's own Corporate Plan.
- b) To deliver this vision, the Council has identified five key priorities that underpin all aspects of the Council's work:
 - A Healthy Halton
 - Environment & Regeneration in Halton
 - Children & Young People in Halton
 - Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton
 - A Safer Halton
- c) The Corporate Plan is built on these five shared priorities, plus a sixth priority about the way we run the business. There are clear objectives and targets for each priority that are common to the two plans.

- d) The Council has a range of performance indicators used to measure progress against its key priorities in the Corporate Plan. Quarterly monitoring reports record progress against key service plan objectives and targets. These are reported to the Corporate Management Team and to the Policy and Performance Boards.
- e) The Council's medium term financial strategy, capital programme, and budget process ensure that financial resources are directed to the Council's priorities.

3.2 Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined roles and functions

- a) Roles and responsibilities for governance are defined and allocated so that accountability for decisions made and actions taken are clear. The Executive Board is the main decision-making body of the Council and is made up of ten members who have responsibility for particular portfolios. The Board is chaired by the Leader of the Council and each Board member has responsibility for policy development for issues that fall within their portfolio.
- b) The Council also appoints a number of committees to discharge the Council's regulatory and scrutiny responsibilities. These arrangements, and the delegated responsibilities of officers, are set out in the Council's Constitution.
- c) The Constitution also includes a Member/Officer protocol which describes and regulates the way in which members and officers should interact to work effectively together.
- d) There is a well-established overview and scrutiny framework with six Policy and Performance Boards (PPBs) aligned to the Council's six corporate plan priorities (the five shared priorities and "Efficient and Effective Services"). They hold the Executive to account, scrutinise performance and develop policy proposals for consideration by the Executive.
- e) The Business Efficiency Board has been designated as the Council's Audit Committee. Its core functions are consistent with those identified in the CIPFA publication 'Audit Committees – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities'. It provides assurance to the Council on the effectiveness of the governance arrangements, risk management framework and internal control environment.
- f) The Chief Executive (and Head of Paid Service) is responsible for and accountable to the Council for all aspects of operational management.
- g) The Operational Director – Finance, as the s151 Officer appointed under the 1972 Local Government Act, is the Council's Chief Financial Officer and carries overall responsibility for the financial administration of the Council. The Council's governance arrangements relating to the role of the CFO comply with those arrangements set out in the CIPFA statement on the role of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) in Local Government (2010).

- h) The Monitoring Officer (Operational Director – Legal and Democratic Services) carries overall responsibility for legal and regulatory compliance.
- i) The Strategic Director – Children and Enterprise is designated as the Council's Director of Children's Services.
- j) The Strategic Director – Communities is designated as the Council's Director of Adult Services.
- k) The Strategic Director – Policy and Resources is designated as the Council's Statutory Scrutiny Officer as required under Section 31 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.
- l) All employees have clear conditions of employment and job descriptions which set out their roles and responsibilities.
- m) The Council has clearly set out terms and conditions for the remuneration of members and officers and there is an effective structure for managing the process.

3.3 Promoting values and upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour

- a) The Council has a Standards Committee to promote high standards of member conduct. Elected members have to agree to follow a Code of Conduct to ensure high standards in the way they undertake their duties. The Standards Committee trains and advises them on the Code of Conduct.
- b) Officer behaviour is governed by the Employees' Code of Conduct. The Code has been formulated to provide a set of standards of conduct expected of employees at work and the link between that work and their private lives.
- c) The Council takes fraud, corruption and maladministration seriously and has established policies which aim to prevent or deal with such occurrences:
 - Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Strategy;
 - Fraud Response Plan;
 - Confidential Reporting Code (Whistleblowing Policy);
 - HR policies regarding discipline of staff involved in such incidents.
- d) A corporate complaints procedure exists to receive and respond to any complaints received.
- e) Arrangements exist to ensure that members and employees are not influenced by prejudice, bias or conflicts of interest in dealing with different stakeholders. These include:
 - Registers of interests;

- Declarations of personal or prejudicial interests at the start of each meeting in which discussions involve a matter in which a member has an interest;
- Registers of gifts and hospitality, which are available for public inspection;
- Equal opportunities policy.

3.4 Taking informed and transparent decisions and managing risk

- a) The Council's decision-making processes are clear, open and transparent. The Council's Constitution sets out how the Council operates and the processes for policy and decision-making. Key decisions are published in the Council's Forward Plan. Agendas and minutes of all meetings are published on the Council's website.
- b) The Council provides decision-makers with information that is fit for purpose. The executive report template requires information to be provided explaining the legal, financial and risk implications of decisions, as well as implications for each of the corporate priorities and any equality and diversity implications.
- c) The Council has a Risk Management Policy and Toolkit and regularly reviews its corporate and directorate risk registers. The management of risk is monitored through the Council's quarterly performance monitoring arrangements.
- d) Each of the five specialist strategic partnerships (SSPs) has conducted a risk assessment of its objectives to form a Partnership Risk Register.
- e) The Business Efficiency Board approves and reviews the internal audit work programme and oversees the implementation of audit recommendations.

3.5 Developing the capacity and capability of Members and Officers

- a) Management of Human Resources has always been a priority for the Council. It first received accreditation as an Investor in People in 1997, with it being renewed for the fourth time in 2010.
- b) The Council has developed a People Strategy to assist the organisation in addressing leadership, skills development, recruitment and retention, and pay issues in a structured and coordinated way. This will also help the Council plan for the future by providing a framework to assess its current workforce and people management activity and to identify any gaps that need to be filled.
- c) The Council's training and development programme stretches right across the organisation to include members and employees. The Council was awarded the NW Charter for Elected Member Development Exemplar Level status in May 2007.
- d) Newly elected members attend a three-day induction programme with follow-up mentoring and are offered a personal development interview.

- e) All new employees attend an induction programme with a more detailed programme for new managers.
- f) Every employee has an annual Employee Development Review (EDR) to identify key tasks and personal development needs linked to delivering our priorities. Training needs identified in this way are used to design the corporate training programme. They are also used to identify specialised professional training needs.

3.6 Engagement with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability

- a) The Council's planning and decision-making processes are designed to include consultation with stakeholders and the submission of views by local people.
- b) Arrangements for consultation and for gauging local views include both formal and informal arrangements:
 - Formal arrangements include the Halton 2000 Citizens' Panel, the seven Area Forums, the Youth Forums, Older Person's engagement network (Halton OPEN).
 - Informal arrangements include contact via our website, Halton Direct Link and magazine based customer surveys.
- c) Community and voluntary sector representatives have decision-making roles on the Halton Strategic Partnership Board and on all its SSPs.
- d) The Executive Board has adopted a new approach to locality working, which each Local Area Forum is using to encourage greater participation and involvement.
- e) Within the Halton Strategic Partnership (HSP), responsibility for quarterly performance management of the five priorities rests with the five thematic partnerships (SSPs). A new performance management framework is in place to ensure that a consistent approach is taken by the SSPs and exceptions reported to the Strategic Partnership Board.
- f) The HSP produces an annual report and stages a whole partnership event each year where progress against the Community Strategy is reported and achievements are celebrated.
- g) The Council's publishes a summary of performance information and its financial statements in the Council newspaper, which is distributed to every household in the Borough.
- h) Council agendas, minutes and performance information are published on the Council's website.

4. Review of Effectiveness

4.1 Halton Borough Council annually reviews the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by managers within the Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the work of Internal Audit and by comments made by the external auditors and other inspection agencies.

4.2 The processes applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the system of governance include:

- The work of the Business Efficiency Board as the Council's Audit Committee;
- The work of the Standards Committee;
- The role of the Policy and Performance Boards in holding the Executive to account;
- The operation of the Council's risk management and performance management frameworks;
- The work of internal audit and the Head of Audit's annual report;
- The review of the effectiveness of internal audit;
- The Annual Governance Report issued by the Audit Commission, which reports on issues arising from the audit of the Council's financial statements and the results of the work undertaken to assess how well the Council uses and manages its resources to deliver value for money and better and sustainable outcomes for local people;
- The external auditor's opinion report on the Council's financial statements;
- The corporate complaints procedure;
- The roles of the Council's Statutory Officers;
- The work of the Information Management Group;
- The anti-fraud and corruption and whistleblowing framework;
- The results of external inspections by independent review bodies.

- 4.3 The Business Efficiency Board has been advised on the implications of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework and has considered the evidence provided with regards to the production of the Annual Governance Statement. The conclusion of the review is that the Council's overall governance and financial management arrangements are sound.

Rob Polhill
Leader of the Council

David Parr
Chief Executive