

**REPORT TO:** Audit and Governance Board

**DATE:** 25 September 2024

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Director - Finance

**PORTFOLIO:** Corporate Services

**SUBJECT:** Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

**WARD(S)** Borough wide

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 This report presents the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) to accompany the 2023/24 statement of accounts. The preparation and publication of an AGS is necessary to meet the statutory requirement set out in regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.
- 1.2 The format of the AGS follows the 2016 best practice guidance issued by CIPFA / Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE).

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION:**

**The Board is asked to consider and approve the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement subject to any changes or additions that members feel appropriate.**

**3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The AGS provides a summary of the authority's governance arrangements during 2023/24 and provides an opinion on whether they were fit for purpose. It also identifies any issues with the Council's governance arrangements and sets out how such issues will be addressed.
- 3.2 CIPFA produces guidance for producing the AGS 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework', and the guidance requires the AGS be current at the point of publication, which is concurrent with the Statement of Accounts.
- 3.3 To ensure the AGS is up to date when the external audit of the financial statements is completed, CIPFA have recommended that authorities review the draft AGS to identify any changes required before the audit is finalised and obtain formal approval for the reviewed version prior to publication.
- 3.4 CIPFA guidance states that the AGS need not be updated for any issues emerging after 31 March 2024 unless they were pertinent to

the previous financial year. As such, the outcome and Council response to the recent Ofsted inspection report will be addressed in the 2024/25 AGS.

- 3.5 The draft AGS was originally presented to the Board in June 2024. The areas identified for development in the action plan remain unchanged from the version previously approved by the Board.
- 3.6 The Council's Constitution delegates the responsibility to review and approve the AGS to the Audit and Governance Board. As such, the document will be updated if necessary to consider any feedback from the Board.
- 3.7 Once approved by the Audit and Governance Board, the AGS will be signed by the Council Leader and Chief Executive who are responsible for ensuring that any significant actions identified to enhance the Council's governance arrangements are addressed.
- 3.8 The final signed version of the AGS will be published on the Council's website.

#### 4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The powers and duties of the Audit and Governance Board include responsibility for considering the Council's corporate governance arrangements and agreeing necessary actions to ensure compliance with best practice. The AGS provides a commitment to address the governance challenges identified by the Council.

#### 5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the report.

#### 6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

##### 6.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

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.

##### 6.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**

See 6.1

##### 6.3 **Supporting Children, Young People and Families**

See 6.1

##### 6.4 **Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**

See 6.1

**6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future**

See 6.1

**6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

See 6.1

**7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The AGS provides assurance that the Council has a sound system of risk management, control and governance. The document provides a public statement of how the Council directs and controls its functions and relates to its community.

**8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The Council has to have regard to the elimination of unlawful discrimination and harassment and the promotion of equality under the Equalities Act 2010 and related statutes. Proper governance arrangements will ensure that equality and diversity issues are appropriately addressed.

**9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATION**

9.1 None arising from this report.

**10.0 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 (2016)	Halton Stadium, Widnes	Merv Murphy
CIPFA / SOLACE - Delivering good governance in Local Government: Guidance note for English authorities (2016)		