

ANNUAL
**GOVERNANCE
STATEMENT**
2022-23

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FOREWORD

The County Council's governance arrangements have stood up well in a year of volatility that saw the illegal invasion of Ukraine, the global energy crisis and economic uncertainty. High inflation in the UK, driven by post-pandemic supply chain problems, the war in Ukraine, and rising petrol, food and energy prices worldwide, has put a strain on public finances at a national and local level.

In some instances, changes made as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have improved the efficiency of how the Council operates in this time. This includes using innovative solutions to automate previous manual activity, including in our contact centres, thereby improving business processes and the experience of users. In addition, the mechanisms the Council uses to translate the principles of good governance into its policies, practices and procedures have transferred well to aspects such as hybrid working.

In December 2022, the proposed Suffolk County Deal was published. The proposed Deal will provide flexibilities and funding that will enable Suffolk to have more control to drive growth and tackle local challenges. If approved, the Deal will have implications for the Council's governance and constitution, with the Council moving to adopt a directly elected leader and cabinet governance model. Public consultation on the proposed Deal, the next important step in the process, will commence in the summer. The government has also published the English Devolution Accountability Framework, which sets out how areas with devolution deals will be scrutinised and held to account through local scrutiny, by the public and by government.

Towards the end of 2022-23, there were two significant changes to the Council's governance set-up. On 1 January 2023, Chris Bally, Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director Corporate Services, left the County Council to take up the role of Chief Executive at East Suffolk Council. Interim arrangements were put in place to cover this absence. The Council is in the process of recruiting his replacement, which should conclude by the end of April 2023. Tim Ryder, the Council's Monitoring Officer retired in February 2023, and Nigel Inniss became the Council's new Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer from 1 March 2023.

Many of the actions from the 2021-22 Annual Governance Statement have been implemented and are covered in this document in the assurance statements from officers relating to their areas of responsibility. These include implementing a new dashboard-based corporate performance report and reinstating the Council's public engagement roadshows post COVID-19. The Council's new Corporate Workforce Strategy has been developed and takes effect in the coming year. Some actions, such as recognising and, where appropriate, acting on emerging government policy, remain ongoing.

The Council's Annual Plan 2023-24, which sits alongside this Annual Governance Statement as a key delivery document of the Council, also includes a renewed focus on providing value for money for the Suffolk taxpayer. Progress on the delivery of key commitments in the Annual Plan will be tracked through a new dashboard.

Risk management, throughout the organisation, remains a priority. The strategic risk register is reviewed regularly to ensure it is dynamic and relevant for a currently volatile external environment.

The Action Plan at the end of this document sets out the ongoing and new actions we will be taking alongside our ongoing stewardship of the authority.

This year's Annual Governance Statement conveys the ongoing efforts of staff and Councillors to uphold the core governance principles of the Council. The assurance statements and resulting actions continue to underline the importance of good judgement in balancing governance with the investment in, and delivery of, services for the people of Suffolk.



Nicola Beach
Chief Executive,
Suffolk County Council



APPROVAL OF THE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

We have been advised on the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by the Audit Committee, and that the arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.

To the best of our knowledge, the governance arrangements as defined within the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance have continued to operate effectively.

The Annual Governance Statement shows that our high standards have been maintained and no significant issues are reported.

Specific opportunities for improvement in governance and internal controls are detailed within the action plan. We propose, over the coming year, to take steps to address these opportunities to further enhance our governance arrangements.

We are satisfied that these actions will deliver, over appropriate timescales, the improvements necessary and these will continue to be monitored, evaluated, and reported on as part of our next annual review.



COUNCILLOR MATTHEW HICKS

Leader of Suffolk County Council



NICOLA BEACH

Chief Executive,
Suffolk County Council



SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Suffolk County Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised. It is also responsible for ensuring that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently, and effectively.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proportionate and appropriate arrangements for the governance of its affairs and facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

The Council has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy)/SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers) Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework (2016 Edition)'.

This document explains how the Council has complied with the code and meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 in relation to the publication of a statement on internal control.

The governance arrangements over the Council's wholly owned companies: Concertus, Vertas, and Opus People Solutions (Opus) (operating under the trading name 'Vertas Group'), and partially owned company: Housing Joint Venture – Edmundham Developments, are incorporated within this Annual Governance Statement.

WHAT IS GOVERNANCE?

Good Governance is about achieving the intended outcomes while acting in the public interest at all times.

Governance is about how the Council ensures that it is doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest, and accountable manner.

Corporate governance generally refers to the processes by which an organisation is directed, controlled, led, and held to account.

The Council's governance framework aims to ensure that in conducting its business it:

- Operates in a lawful, open, inclusive, and honest manner.
- Makes sure public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and spent wisely.
- Has effective arrangements in place to manage risk.
- Meets the needs of Suffolk communities.
- Secures continuous improvements in the way it operates.





THE PURPOSE OF THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

The governance framework includes a set of legislative requirements, governance principles and management processes which the Council follows:

Principles of corporate governance

Principle A: Integrity and Values

- Staying true to our strong ethical standards of conduct
- Respecting the rule of law
- Creating a culture where statutory officers and other key post holders are able to fulfil their responsibilities
- Ensuring fraud, corruption and abuse of position are dealt with effectively
- Ensuring a safe environment to raise concerns and learning from our mistakes

Principle B: Openness and Engagement

- Keeping relevant information open to the public and continuing their involvement
- Consultation feedback from the public is used to support service and budget decisions
- Providing clear rationale for decision making - being explicit about risk, impact and benefits
- Having effective scrutiny to constructively challenge what we do and decisions made

Principle C: Working Together

- Staying true to our strong ethical and standards of conduct
- Respecting the law
- Creating a culture where statutory officers and others key post holders are able to fulfil their responsibilities
- Ensuring fraud, corruption and abuse of positions are dealt with effectively
- Ensuring a safe environment to raise concerns and learn from our mistakes

Principle D: Making a Difference

- Having a clear vision and strategy setting out our intended outcome for citizens and service users

Principle E: Capability

- Clear roles and responsibilities for Council leadership
- Maintaining a development programme that allows Councillors and officers to gain the skills and knowledge they need to perform well in their roles
- Evaluating Councillor and officers' performance, compliments and complaints to enable results (outcomes) to be measured and enable learning

Principle F: Managing Risk and Performance

- Ensuring that effective risk management and performance systems are in place, and that these are integrated in our business systems / service units
- Having well developed assurance arrangements in place - including any commercial activities
- Having an effective Audit Committee
- Effective counter fraud arrangements in place

Principle G: Transparency and Accountability

- Having rigorous and transparent decision making processes in place
- Maintaining an effective scrutiny process
- Publishing up-to-date and good quality information on our activities and decisions
- Maintaining an effective internal and external audit function

This framework is used to examine the services being provided and whether they are satisfying the objectives set. The governance framework has been in place at the Council for the year ended 31 March 2023 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and statement of accounts.



HOW THE COUNCIL WORKS

1. Elected Councillors set the Council's strategic direction by developing and keeping under review the corporate objectives of the Council. The objectives give a clear direction for what is important politically and drive the work of Council services every day.

The objectives for 2022-23 were:

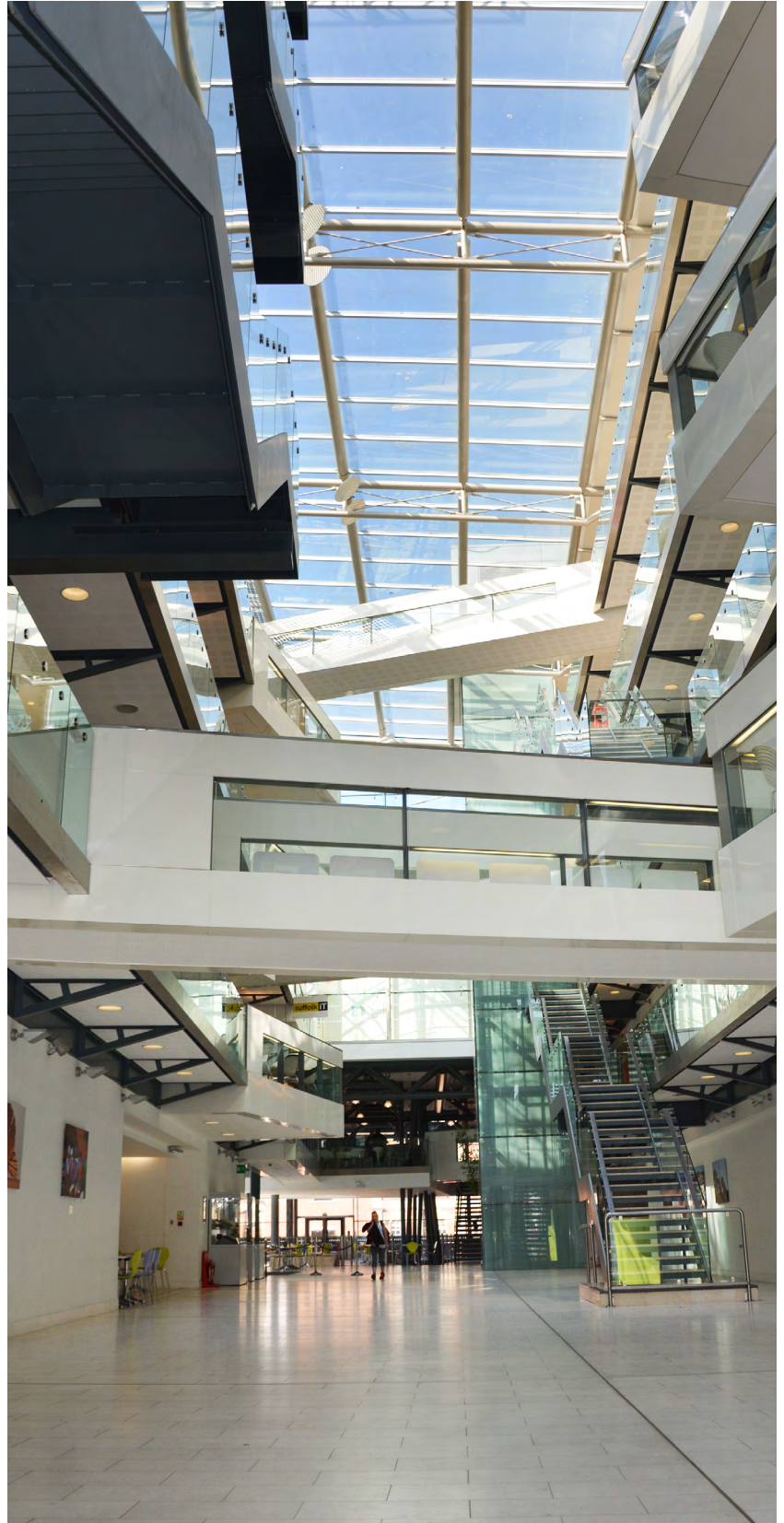
- I. **Promoting and supporting the health and wellbeing of all people in Suffolk** – maximising our ability to innovate, adapt and work in partnership with individuals, communities and partners.
 - II. **Strengthening our local economy** – maximising economic opportunities that benefit everyone, so that no one is left behind.
 - III. **Protecting and enhancing our environment** – working to protect and enhance Suffolk's environment and biodiversity, while also reducing harmful carbon emissions.
 - IV. **Providing value for money for the Suffolk taxpayer** – being bold and challenging in ensuring value for money and accountability to local people in everything that we do.
2. There is an established, integrated planning process which ensures Council services are delivered in accordance with the Council's objectives and represent the best use of resources. The 2022-23 Annual Plan was approved at the meeting of the County Council, alongside the budget, in February 2022.
3. Performance is measured against corporate objectives.
4. There is a written Constitution in place which specifies the roles and responsibilities of the executive, non-executive, scrutiny, and officer functions, setting clear delegation arrangements and protocols for effective communication.
5. Codes of Conduct have been developed which define the standards of behaviour for Councillors and employees.
6. The Constitution, Schemes of Delegation to members and officers, Financial Procedure Rules and other supporting procedures clearly define how decisions are taken and highlight the processes and controls required to manage risks, with appropriate review procedures.
7. The Audit Committee promotes and maintains high standards in relation to the operation of the Council's Code of Corporate Governance ensuring that the Council operates within the law, in accordance with the Council's internal procedures, and follows the framework and guidance issued by CIPFA/SOLACE. The Committee is also responsible for monitoring the risk management framework and control environment to ensure the Council's financial and non-financial performance is properly monitored.





HOW THE COUNCIL WORKS

8. Statutory officers support and monitor the Council's governance arrangements, ensuring expenditure is lawful and the Council continues to comply with relevant laws and regulations, internal policies, and procedures.
9. There are arrangements for whistleblowing and for receiving and investigating complaints from the public, supporting the measurement of the quality of services for users.
10. The Council seeks to keep communities informed, giving local people the opportunity to get involved in the decision-making process, promoting local democracy, and supporting and shaping places and local communities.





KEY ROLES

The key roles of those responsible for developing and maintaining the Governance Framework are:

<p>The Council</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Approves the Annual Plan. ■ Approves the Constitution including the Financial Regulations. ■ Approves key policies and budgetary framework.
<p>Cabinet</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The main decision-making body of the Council. ■ Made up of the Leader of the Council and a number of Cabinet members with responsibility for different portfolios.
<p>Audit Committee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provides independent assurance to the Council on the adequacy and effectiveness of the governance arrangements, risk management framework and internal control environment. ■ Promotes high standards of Member conduct and approves the Annual Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement.
<p>Scrutiny Committees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Support and challenge the Council in carrying out its responsibilities.
<p>Corporate Leadership Team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Chief Executive has overall accountability for the governance framework. ■ Implements the policy and budgetary framework set by the Council and provides advice to Cabinet and the Council on the development of future policy and budgetary issues and oversees the implementation of Council policy. ■ Accountability for developing and maintaining the Council's governance and risk framework.
<p>Chief Finance Officer (s151)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Leads and directs the financial strategy of the Council and ensures the Council controls and manages its money well. Is suitably qualified and experienced, and ensures the Finance Team is fit for purpose. ■ Accountable for developing and maintaining the Council's internal control and counter fraud framework. ■ Contributes to the effective corporate management and governance of the Council.
<p>Monitoring Officer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Advises the Council on ethical issues, standards, and powers to ensure the Council operates within the law and statutory Codes of Practice. ■ Overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of the Whistleblowing Policy and contributes to the effective corporate management and governance of the Council.



KEY ROLES

The key roles of those responsible for developing and maintaining the Governance Framework are:

Internal Audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Provides independent assurance and opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's governance, risk management and control framework.■ Delivers an annual programme of risk-based audit activity, including counter-fraud and investigation activity.■ Makes recommendations for improvements in the management of risk.
External Audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Audits / reviews and reports on the Council's financial statements (including the Annual Governance Statement), providing an opinion on the accounts and use of resources, concluding on the arrangements in place for securing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the use of resources (the value for money conclusion).
Directors & Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Responsible for developing, maintaining, and implementing the Council's governance, risk, and control framework.■ Contribute to the effective corporate management and governance of the Council.



REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

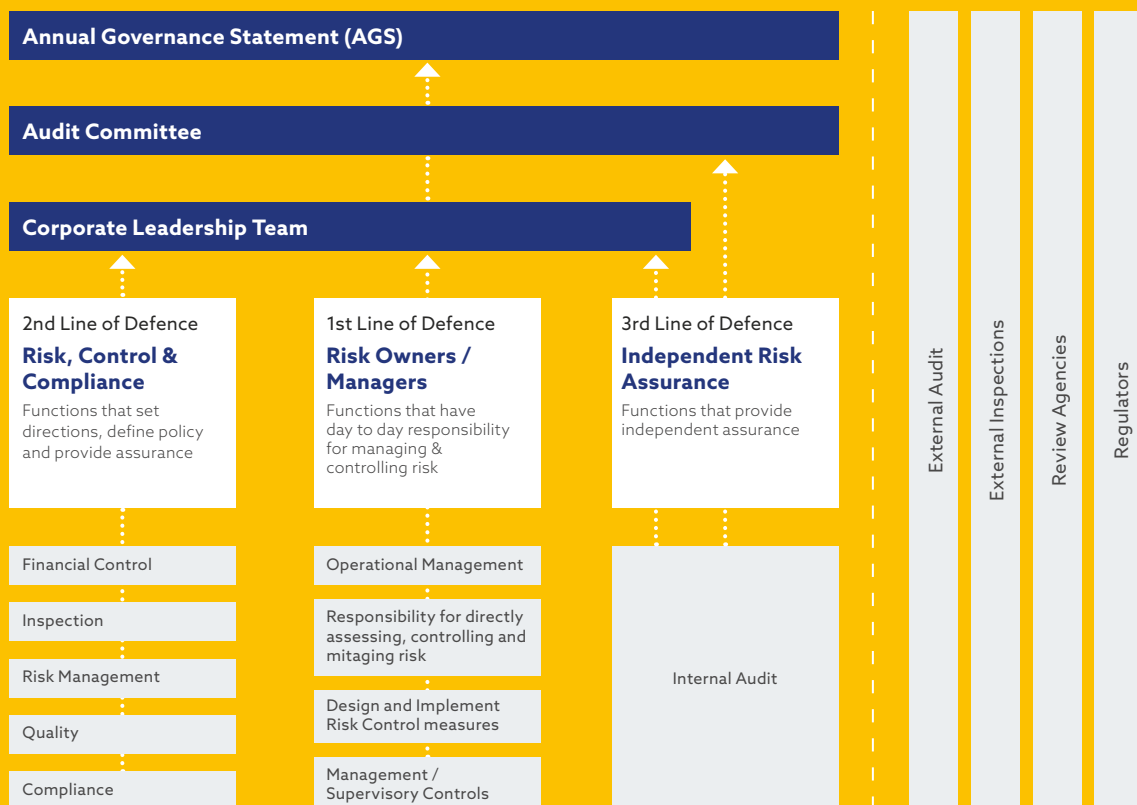
In preparing the Annual Governance Statement the Council has:

- Reviewed the Council's existing governance arrangements against the revised CIPFA/ SOLACE 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government framework - 2016 Edition' good practice guidance.
- Reviewed the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance to ensure it reflects this guidance, including the revised seven principles of good governance and associated required actions and behaviours taken by the Council that demonstrate good governance.

- Assessed the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements against the revised Local Code of Corporate Governance.
- Obtained assurance statements from Officers relating to their areas of responsibility, including actions from the 2021-22 Annual Governance Statement.

The review of effectiveness is informed by the three lines of defence (i.e., the relationship between managers responsible for the operational delivery; accountable managers who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment; the Head of Internal Audit's independent risk assurance role) and inspections made by external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

This is demonstrated here:















The roles and responsibilities are applied in a pragmatic real-world manner. In reality, a significant amount of policy, associated guidance, training and tools are provided at second line with a proportionate risk-based application of assurance and compliance activity. Internal Audit use a risk-based methodology to determine their annual programme to support the application of the governance model within the organisation. This allows the second and third lines of defence to place emphasis in the right place and work effectively and efficiently to help management achieve organisational objectives through delivery, support and challenge.



GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK ASSURANCE

The key sources of assurance that inform this review and where it is obtained from are outlined below

WHERE DO WE NEED ASSURANCE?	WHERE CAN / DO WE GET ASSURANCE FROM?
 Compliance	 Constitution
 Democratic Engagement & Public Accountability	 Audit Committee, Council Executive & Scrutiny
 Management of Risk	 Internal & External Audit
 Financial Management	 Independent & External Sources
 Members & Officers Roles & Responsibilities	 Financial Strategy
 Standards of Conduct & Behaviour	 Complaints System, Counter Fraud & Whistle Blowing
 Action Plan Approved & Reported on	 HR Policies & Codes of Conduct
 Effectiveness of Internal Controls	 Risk Management Strategy & Framework
 Services Delivered	 Performance Management System



GOVERNANCE



NIGEL INNIS
Monitoring Officer

The Council has a Constitution made under Section 37 of the Local Government Act 2000. Its purpose is to enable the Council to set a strategic vision for the provision of local public services and to act as champion for Suffolk. The Constitution supports development of the Council's capacity, and the capability of the individuals within it, and ensures that decisions are taken while respecting the rule of law.

During 2022 and 2023, Full Council agreed amendments to the Constitution regarding the arrangements for public questions at Full Council, Cabinet and committees; revised delegations regarding planning matters; updates to the governance arrangements for the Suffolk Pension Fund; and increasing the number of Independent Persons sitting on the Audit Committee from one to two, for greater depth and breadth of audit experience.

Through openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement, local people have every opportunity to know how decisions are taken and how to influence those decisions. The Council consults on major decisions, agendas and papers for meetings are published, Full Council and Cabinet meetings are webcast, and the public can participate in

these meetings by asking questions or raising petitions. After the lapsing of the interim legislative arrangements, Full Council, Cabinet, and other committees' meetings have reverted to face-to-face. The transition to the Council's usual ways of working, following the pandemic, have been seamless and provided the Council with a sound framework for conducting good governance.

A comprehensive induction programme for all Councillors, whether returning or new to the Authority, is now embedded in the Council. It provides helpful, coordinated training that reflects the Council's values and enables sound decision making. The training covers aspects such as the Code of Conduct, equality and inclusion, safeguarding, and health and safety. Cabinet Members, chairs of committees and committee members have had specific training to ensure they fully understand their roles and responsibilities, and how these contribute to the governance of the Council.

Following the Council agreeing, in March 2022, to adopt the Model Code of Conduct prepared by the Local Government Association, the Code became applicable from 1 May 2022. It was also agreed that all county councillors should receive training by the Monitoring Officer on the new Code and the standards regime. The Monitoring Officer conducted ten training sessions, eight in person and two hybrid. Seventy-two councillors attended the sessions.

The various scrutiny committees provide reassurance to local people that Council decisions which affect them are subject to stringent and challenging review with in-depth critical analysis. For example, the Audit Committee is responsible for reviewing the Council's corporate governance arrangements and considering whether specific opportunities for improvements in governance and internal controls are being addressed.



GOVERNANCE cont...

The Audit Committee continues to take an active interest in the governance arrangements of the Council's wholly owned companies. Having reviewed these again in November 2022, the committee remains satisfied that the Council's roles and responsibilities as shareholder are well managed by the structures in place.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) Annual Review Letter for the year ending 31 March 2022 was discussed at Audit Committee in October 2022. Of the 148 enquiries relating to the County Council received from the LGSCO during the reporting period of the Annual Review, 54 (36%) were forwarded for investigation of which 33 (61%) were upheld, compared to 67% last year. The remaining 21 complaints were not upheld.

At their June 2023 meeting, the Audit Committee will consider the Annual Standards Report for 2022/23. During 2022/23 the Monitoring Officer received seven complaints about instances when a councillor had allegedly breached the Code of Conduct. There were also seven instances in the previous year. Of the seven complaints, a breach was found to have occurred in one of these. Counting as one complaint the multiple complaints about a former councillor received in 2020/21 gives a total of seventy complaints since the current arrangements prescribed by the Localism Act 2011 were introduced in July 2012.

Following the May 2021 elections, a by-election was held for the Beccles vacancy in November 2022, and further by-elections will be held for Felixstowe Coastal and Priory Heath in May 2023.

The Council has continued to demonstrate sound decision making following the election of the new Council in May 2021. This is testimony to the robust governance arrangements that the Council has in place. It is the opinion of the Monitoring Officer that the Council has complied with its Constitution and its corporate governance arrangements continue to be sound.





FINANCIAL GOVERNANCE



LOUISE AYNSLEY
Chief Financial (s151) Officer

The statutory role of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) in relation to financial administration and stewardship of the Council and their role in the organisation are key to ensuring that financial discipline and strong public financial management is maintained.

The Council has robust arrangements for effective financial control through accounting procedures, key financial systems, and the Financial Regulations and Procedural Responsibilities, which are compliant with accounting & auditing standards and guidance. To ensure financial sustainability, the Council plans and manages its resources so it can deliver its services. The responsibility for the effective management of the Council's budgets is delegated to designated managers within its Directorates.

The Council's Financial Statements and arrangements for securing value for money are reviewed each year by its external auditor, Ernst & Young. The Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2022 were signed by the S151 Officer on 7 July 2022, in advance of the statutory deadline of 31 July.

The statutory deadline of 30 November for the sign-off of the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2022 by Ernst & Young was not met. This was due to national issues arising around Infrastructure Assets and recent triannual valuations completed by pension funds. Reports on the progress of the audit of these Financial Statements were taken to Audit Committee in November 2022 and March 2023.

The accounts were signed off at the meeting of the Audit Committee on 5th June 2023, where Ernst & Young also highly commended the work of the Finance Team. Ernst & Young issued its Annual Report to the Audit Committee in July 2023.

The Council has opted into the Public Sector Auditor Appointments framework, as an efficient approach to procuring external audit services. Ernst & Young remains the Council's appointed auditor for 2022-23.

The Council's 2022-23 budget, approved in February 2022, was set amidst challenging economic and social circumstances resulting from the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the global energy crisis impacted sharply on inflation, significantly above the assumptions made in setting the budget, with this uncertainty continuing throughout 2022-23. This meant budgeting and forecasting throughout the year has been more challenging, and it has been necessary to accept greater risks associated with the accuracy of forecasts than in pre-pandemic years.

Comprehensive financial reports were provided to Cabinet for each quarter of 2022-23. A significant overspend for 2022-23 was forecast early in the financial year with pressures arising from the proposed national pay award, increasing interest rates, and increasing cost of living inflation pressures, all impacting on the Council's services for the most vulnerable. Work continued throughout the year with Directorates to mitigate these pressures as much as possible. The Council has adequate reserves to support an overspend in 2022-23. However, the Council acknowledges that this is a short-term measure and that sustainable plans are needed moving forward.



FINANCIAL GOVERNANCE **cont...**

The affordability of the Council's Capital Programme remains under regular review, with cost management more important than ever given acute inflationary pressures and the increased cost of borrowing. The Capital Strategy Group has met regularly to ensure accountability and visibility of all projects in the capital programme. A reprofiling of budgets exercise was undertaken during Quarter 2 to ensure budgets remain aligned to plans and delivery in 2022-23.

Capital resources are scarce, especially given recent rises in interest rates and inflation, so not all requests for investment by Directorates can be accepted by the Capital Strategy Group for inclusion in the Capital Programme. Where there is a sound case for progressing with a scheme, except for the lack of resources to finance it, that scheme is incorporated into the Council's capital pipeline. This pipeline contains schemes planned for up to ten years into the future and is reviewed periodically to assess whether there is scope for transferring such schemes into the Capital Programme. During the year, eight business cases for additional investment were presented to Cabinet and approved, totalling £79 million.

The Council has continued to progress with work on Oracle Fusion - the integrated system for Human Resources and Payroll, Finance and Purchasing. During the year, a new Budget Management and Oracle Fusion Induction Guide was made available for all budget managers and officers involved in the Council's financial processes. It is designed to explain their responsibilities and the tools available to help meet those responsibilities. New tools to support budget managers with forecasting have also been rolled out and reports continue to be developed to support financial management across the council.

Planning for 2023-24 commenced in June 2022 and continued up to the Full Council meeting in February where the 2023-24 Budget was approved. The Council's Budget Strategy recognises that, for the Council to continue delivering the best possible services within available resources in 2023-24, it is essential to take a medium-term view of the Council's Budget, focus on meeting the Council's corporate objectives and associated Directorate Annual Plans, and rise to the challenge presented by the economic environment.

A further key element of the Budget Strategy is having adequate reserves available to manage any unexpected changes to spending and funding plans. This involves the Council assessing and, where possible, quantifying the financial risks it is facing. A core principle is that reserves should not be used to cover ongoing gaps between expenditure and funding and should be replenished as soon as practicable when used. The Council is in a robust position to face the financial challenges and uncertainty ahead, based on its healthy reserve balances and a history of strong financial management. It recognises that both will need to be maintained moving forward, enabling it to take effective mitigating actions in a timely manner should this be required.

The CIPFA Financial Management Code (FM code) provides guidance for good and sustainable financial management in local authorities and provides assurance that authorities are managing their resources effectively. The code sets out the principles local authorities should be guided by in managing their finances and the specific standards that they should, as a minimum, seek to achieve. The initial assessment carried out in 2021-22 recognised that, whereas the Council was broadly compliant with the financial management standards, there was scope for development and improvement.

The opinion of the Chief Financial Officer is that the Council continues to operate robust internal controls and good public financial management. Further action is required to manage financial pressures and develop strategies to meet the long-term financial challenges that face the Council. There has been no need for the Chief Financial Officer to exercise her statutory powers and the Council complies with its financial regulations and procedures together with relevant codes of practice and guidance. The Finance Function continues to provide an effective and efficient service while enabling the Council to meet its objectives within a robust financial framework.



INTERNAL AUDIT



PETER FROST
Head of Internal Audit

Internal Audit is an independent and objective function with all audit work carried out in this capacity and in accordance with the Audit Charter, Code of Ethics and Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

The Head of Internal Audit has a responsibility under the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards to provide an independent, annual, internal audit opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's governance, risk, and control framework (i.e., the control environment) and therefore the extent to which the Council can rely on it and inform its Annual Governance Statement.

No system of control can provide absolute assurance against material misstatement/loss or eliminate risk, nor can Internal Audit give that assurance. The work of Internal Audit is intended only to provide reasonable assurance on controls.

An internal audit review of the Council's compliance to the seven core principles of good governance, underpinned by detailed risk, assurance and governance audits, has provided substantial assurance that there are sound arrangements in place.

92% of internal audit work completed during 2022-23 has yielded an acceptable level of assurance (substantial or reasonable) of the design and operation of the services, systems and processes audited. This includes all corporate governance and financial management related audits.

Audit reviews that have presented significant concern relate to specific parts of the Council, rather than an across-the-board breakdown in controls. These audits are in the minority, and generally controls are sufficient to prevent or detect serious breakdowns in systems and procedures.

As a result of audit work, actions have been agreed to improve controls. These are closely monitored until such time they are completed. Any outstanding weaknesses in the governance, risk and control framework will continue to be followed up by Internal Audit.

There are control areas of potentially higher risk that are being closely monitored by Internal Audit, via audit work and through other assurance providers. These relate to direct payments, SEND and data breaches.

I am satisfied that sufficient internal audit work has been undertaken to allow me to draw a reasonable conclusion as to the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's governance, control, and risk processes.

I have performed my duties in accordance with CIPFA's guidance on the role of the Head of Internal Audit.

Based on the findings of the managed audit and governance reviews carried out throughout 2022-23 and evidence from other assurance providers, and considering the current climate in which the Council is operating, it is the opinion of the Head of Internal Audit that the Authority's governance, risk and control environment provides reasonable assurance that the significant risks facing the Authority are addressed. Generally, risks are well managed, but some areas require the introduction or improvement of internal controls to ensure the achievement of objectives. The Head of Internal Audit does not consider there to be any areas of significant corporate concern.



COUNTER FRAUD



CHRISTOS CONSTANTINOU
Counter Fraud Manager

The Corporate Leadership Team has committed to tackling fraud and corruption affecting the Council, aiming to adopt a culture in which all employees maintain a proactive attitude towards preventing fraud.

The Council's Constitution states that the Chief Financial Officer is responsible for the development and maintenance of an anti-fraud and corruption policy, and that Directors are responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented within their Directorates. Several policies that make up the Council's anti-fraud governance arrangements are in place and regularly reviewed.

As part of the Council's arrangements to tackle fraud, the Counter Fraud Service, part of the Internal Audit Service, is made up of two fulltime staff who work solely on fraud related matters, providing the capability and capacity to deal with such matters.

The Council's Counter Fraud & Corruption Strategy for 2023-25 was approved by CLT in March 2023. The Strategy is in line with best practice and based on the National Fighting Fraud & Corruption Locally Strategy for the 2020s. The Strategy directs the work of the Counter Fraud Service under four workstreams: Governance and Strategy; Fraud Awareness and Prevention; Proactive Exercises; and Investigations and Redress.

The Counter Fraud Service has annual action plans which are approved by the Audit Committee and carry out an annual review against the Fighting

Fraud and Corruption Locally checklist, and the Local Government Counter Fraud Standards to ensure best practice is followed. Furthermore, a half-yearly progress report and an annual report was presented to the Audit Committee in 2022/23.

The 2022/23 action plan was delivered. This included complying with all statutory requirements of the Cabinet Office's National Fraud Initiative exercise by submitting required data on time and passing data quality checks. Fraud awareness training was delivered to a number of teams, including social work practitioners, and anti-bribery awareness training to contract managers. Investigations were carried out in line with the Council's Fraud Response Plan, with the number of referrals received for investigation slightly increasing in 2022/23 compared to previous year.

During the year, Counter Fraud Services, working with Legal Services, successfully prosecuted cases in relation to social care fraud, blue badge misuse, and fraud in schools. This shows that fraud against the public purse will not be tolerated and perpetrators will be held to account.

The Counter Fraud Service continued to build strong working relationships with other local authorities through the Suffolk Fraud Group and the South East Fraud Hub, sharing best practice and acting as a support network.





RISK MANAGEMENT & PERFORMANCE



CAROLINE DAVISON
Head of Policy & Performance

Risk Management

The Council follows an 'Active Risk Management' approach. This framework aligns with the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors' 'Three Lines Model' that promotes the delegation of risk management to those with the appropriate responsibility and oversight. It encourages managers to consider the likelihood of something happening and the potential impact it would have on delivery, and requires a cycle of identifying, assessing and reviewing potential risks. This process is managed alongside other key activities such as strategic and financial planning and performance management.

The Council manages its risks using a corporate risk register supported by industry standard software (JCAD Risk Management) and reinforced by corporate guidance themed around good practice published by HM Government - 'The Orange Book'. JCAD Risk Management is a live, real-time platform that records, monitors and reports risks in a structured and consistent way. Risks are designated a risk score and a risk owner to manage them appropriately.

Corporate Leadership Team and Cabinet Members have oversight of the corporate risk register on a quarterly reporting cycle. In addition to the quarterly reporting cycle, all corporate risks are reviewed annually by CLT and Cabinet Members. This annual review assesses the relevance and suitability of risks and, where appropriate, makes recommendations to the relevant risk owners for further review. This enables senior officers and Cabinet Members to have more oversight of the annual risk review process, as recommended by the Council's Audit Committee.

Corporate Performance

The Council regularly monitors how its services are performing against agreed objectives and targets to assess the impact of decisions on resources, identify areas for improvement, and provide assurance that services are being well managed. This is fundamental to managing the Council well and ensuring its services are delivered effectively and efficiently. Corporate performance is integral to good governance arrangements and reviewed by the Council's leadership every quarter. To help this, a corporate performance dashboard has been designed and is being further developed.

Directorate Leadership Teams report and review performance issues within their areas of responsibility. This directorate process aligns to the corporate model but enables reporting frameworks to reflect business need. Performance information is also used to support benchmarking.

The corporate performance dashboard will help Scrutiny Committees to inform their forward work programmes. In addition, the Audit Committee receives an annual report detailing the Council's corporate performance management arrangements.

In accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, the Council publishes the corporate performance dashboard on its website. The Council also provides statutory data returns to Government that comply with Single Data List requirements. This process provides accountability, transparency and evidence to support the regulatory and external inspection processes.





HUMAN RESOURCES



JEANETTE BRAY

Head of Human Resources, Performance & Change

A new, four-year Workforce Strategy has been developed, informed by wide consultation across directorates and services. The strategy comes into effect from April 2023. It outlines how the County Council will develop as a place to work over the next four years, describing our workforce ambitions, and the six strategic goals we will focus on to help us achieve those ambitions.

At the core of the Strategy is how we maintain and develop a workforce with the skills, behaviours, and capacity we need to successfully deliver our strategic goals and ambitions. There is a focus on upskilling our managers and establishing career pathways and a wider range of career entry points to ensure effective recruitment and retention in key areas. The HR Team will create annual plans to support the Workforce Strategy and the corporate annual plans and will report progress through a set of data measures within the Corporate Performance Report.

To ensure good people management and compliance with legislation and best practice, the Council maintains a comprehensive and accessible suite of employment policies, guidance, toolkits, and procedures. These continue to be regularly reviewed, refreshed, and promoted so that they remain relevant and are utilised effectively by managers and staff.

The implementation of Oracle Fusion, the integrated system for Human Resources and Payroll, Finance and Purchasing, has concluded with the final district councils being migrated onto Oracle Fusion. Work continues on identifying and resolving any residual issues from the implementation phase of the project, but we've also seen the introduction of new functionality like the Oracle Digital Assistant (Chatbot) and the first reports being published to the Manager's Dashboard. The first post-implementation Payroll Internal Audit was completed with Reasonable Assurance, and work has commenced on the recommendations identified through this process.

A suite of mandatory e-learning modules was introduced for the first time for all staff, with some additional modules for managers. The e-learning included statutory topics, such as information governance and health and safety, and averaged a cumulative total of 7.5 hours across the year, which could be undertaken in shorter time slots. The training has been well received and we have prepared a new programme for the coming year, informed by feedback on design and presentation to improve the e-learning modules.

Establishment control mechanisms continue within each directorate with oversight at directorate management team level to ensure that employment budgets are closely managed. This ensures that vacancies and employment changes are scrutinised with HR and Finance input before recruitment or contractual changes are undertaken.

We continue to run monthly webinars for managers throughout the year. These include a regular update from the Chief Executive on corporate issues and from the Head of HR on any relevant staffing matters, ensuring that managers are well-informed and supported in a timely way. Attendance of the webinars continues to be high, with often over 200 attending live and others listening to the recording after the event. Feedback received continues to be very positive.



INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY



KRISHNA YERGOL
Chief Technology Officer

The Council's Technology Strategy continues to enable the Council to become a modern, information-orientated organisation. A new operating model allows the IT service to work closely with Directorates and services and helps support the Service's ambitions both proactively and reactively, while the Technology Strategy continues to be embedded across the organisation.

In line with the ambitions of the Ways We Work programme, the IT Service continues to evolve and support the emerging model of hybrid working. This has entailed upgrading meeting room technology infrastructure, devices and phones, and the network infrastructure to support a more agile and hybrid way of working for staff.

The year has also seen investments and developments in the Council's Centres of Excellence – Data and Business Intelligence, Automation and Integration, and Collaboration – to support the ongoing programme of service improvements and transformation of services.

The Collaboration Centre of Excellence supported work on Homes for Ukraine by providing a solution for managing family engagements and funding; work on COVID monitoring during the pandemic has been adapted to manage generic outbreaks; and the Children's data warehouse is helping provide a quicker and improved frontline service response.

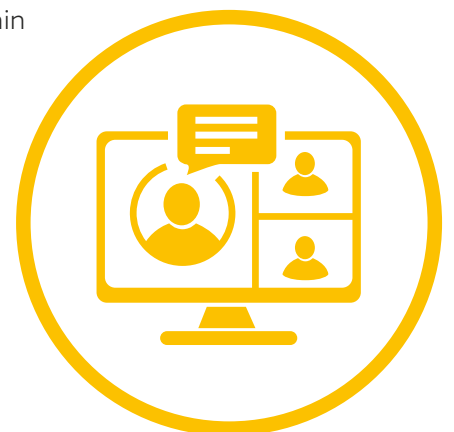
The IT Service's Data and Business Intelligence Centre of Excellence supported the work on the Children's data warehouse; the online provision of homecare reports to homecare providers; improvements to education, health and care plans (EHCPs); and improvements to Youth Justice Service reporting.

The Automation and Integration Centre of Excellence won two global awards for customer excellence relating to Police Safeguarding and is also supporting work to enhance the data exchange with schools.

The Council's new enterprise resource planning solution (Oracle Fusion) was successfully implemented with support from the wider Corporate Services. This should allow services to work much more closely and support the integration of internal workflows and processes.

Collaboration with services in the NHS, including systems-related work with the ICS and health partners in the region, also continued to develop in the last year, facilitated by the IT Service and with support and engagement from People Services.

Priorities for next year include further improvements in network infrastructure, including the Council's Wide Area Network; embedding technology products to facilitate hybrid working; further proactive service improvement work from Centres of Excellence; and embedding the new enterprise resource planning solution across all key functions within Corporate Services.





INFORMATION GOVERNANCE



PETER KNIGHT

Head of Information Governance

Information governance in the County Council is overseen by the Corporate Information Governance Board (CIGB), which is the lead body for ensuring the Council has effective information governance arrangements in place. The CIGB is supported by service-specific information governance boards or information governance leads. The Council also has a network of Strategic Information Agents (SIAs) across the organisation who promote and encourage information governance best practice within their service areas.

The Council has a number of key individuals with specific roles and responsibilities regarding information governance, including a Senior Information Risk Owner; Head of Information Governance; Data Protection Officer and Compliance Manager; IT Security Manager; and Caldicott Guardians.

The Council is subject to a number of external information and IT assurance regimes. This includes various mandatory inspections to facilitate access to various networks and systems, such as the Public Service Network (PSN) Compliance and the Data Security & Protection Toolkit.

The Council continues to receive a high number of Subject Access Requests (SARs), with 233 received in 2022/23. This is a reduction on the previous year, with 264 received in 2021/22. Complying with statutory requirements for responding to SARs has proved a challenge, given the level of requests received. The Council also received 27 other individuals' rights' requests under data protection law, specifically requests for rectification, erasure or the restriction of processing.

The Council continues to receive a high number of Freedom of Information (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) requests. The Council received 1,258 information requests in 2022/23 (compared to 1,247 in 2021/22), but the compliance rate for meeting statutory FOI/EIR deadlines remains high at 93%. There were seven complaints made to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) regarding the Council's response to specific requests.

The Council has seen a slight increase in the overall number of security incidents this year (588 in 2022/23 compared to 577 in 2021/22), although there has been a decrease in the number of more serious incidents (60 in 2022/23 compared to 64 in 2021/22). Seven personal data breaches were serious enough to require notification to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), compared to four in the previous year. The majority of security incidents are the result of human error, such as information being sent to the wrong person via email or in the post.

Some of the specific information governance activities undertaken in 2022-23 include:

- Strengthened security incident reporting and management arrangements in response to the increase in data breaches.
- Reviewed the Council's data protection compliance tools.
- Revised and updated information risk assessment processes, guidance and documentation, with almost 200 Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) undertaken across the organisation during the year.
- Published an Ethical Data Stewardship Charter which lays out a set of principles governing the use of data and associated technologies.
- Produced updated mandatory e-learning training on information management and data security for all Council staff.
- Published an innovative online Publication Scheme to assist people wishing to submit an FOI or EIR request.



PROCUREMENT



MATT WEST

Head of Assets and Investment

The Assets and Investment Procurement Team deliver a professional service to help the Council procure goods and services commercially, legally and at minimal risk, while supporting the Council's policies and in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

The Council's internal Procurement Rules, processes and advice to staff have been updated and maintained in line with the Procurement Policy Notices (PPNs) and guidance issued by the Cabinet Office.

A comprehensive range of training delivered by the Procurement Team is available to staff within the corporate training offer on Oracle Fusion. Training includes the use of the e-procurement system, undertaking tenders, Social Value, and contract management.

A procurement performance dashboard has been developed to monitor and internally review practice regarding procurement. This is reviewed by the Assets & Investment Management Team on a quarterly basis.

The Procurement Team provide advice and guidance relating to P2P (Oracle Fusion Procurement), ensuring users deal with their purchase orders and invoices are paid. Quarterly updates to the system ensure procedures reflect updates beneficial to the organisation. All user guides and additional supporting documents are kept up to date and available for all staff to utilise. Regular drop-in sessions are held to support requisitioners with invoices on hold.

Our Climate Change Commercial Ask is on our website, together with supporting documentation, which includes a checklist for contract managers and guidance for evaluating Social Value Environmental responses in bids.

The Council's Annual Social Value Ask has been reviewed and will be updated with a number of additions to strengthen the Ask regarding Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. The Ask provides a comprehensive list of ideas on how suppliers can deliver Social Value in Suffolk. A Social Value Wellbeing Ask has been developed. This completes the suite of three specific Asks, one for each of the Social Value Themes, sitting alongside our annual Social Value Ask. The Asks give clarity to those organisations who deliver Social Value in Suffolk on how it can be delivered while meeting our Corporate Objectives. The Social Value Ask is published on the Council's website on a page for suppliers on Social Value.

The Council's Contract Management Minimum Standards and supporting checklist have been reviewed and updated. Contract Management Network webinars are held on a quarterly basis to provide additional advice and support for staff with contract management roles, alongside a Contract Management Network group on Teams for sharing information and peer advice. There are over 180 staff following the Contract Management Network Team and between 40 – 50 staff attend each webinar. The webinars this year have included updates for contract managers on Health and Safety, Business Continuity, Data Protection and Fraud. Commercial skills training was included in the Council's mandatory training modules for 2022/23.

The use of Credit Safe (an online credit and business information service) has been actively promoted to service contract managers to help them carry out risk assessments of our suppliers' financial security. As a result the number of Credit Safe users has more than doubled.





COMMUNICATIONS



ANDREW ST. LEDGER

Head of Communications, Consultation & Media

During 2022/23, Suffolk County Council saw the further return of pre-pandemic work and the start of new projects – all of which require engagement with Suffolk residents and county council staff to achieve better results. The Communications Team has once again been at the heart of supporting these projects and campaigns and will continue to be in 2023/24.

Support in 2022/23 included (but not exclusively) Lowestoft’s Gull Wing bridge, the Highways Resurfacing programme, active travel schemes, the creation of more shared Fire and Police facilities, Suffolk’s County Deal, and planning for our next Staff Survey.

2022 also saw the post-pandemic return of our high-profile stand at the Suffolk Show and our countywide ‘Local Matters’ roadshows, with 12 events taking place.

To inform the 2023/24 budget setting process, Suffolk County Council undertook its most ambitious annual budget consultation to date, resulting in over 2,500 responses to the public survey. This year, we also trialled budget focus groups, which proved a success. The results provided a clear steer to senior leaders about public opinion relating to local services and council tax and was a valuable source of information during the budget setting process.

During 2022/23, the Communications Team also supported Adult Social Care, especially around a

public marketing campaign to raise awareness of the continuing challenges faced by Social Care. Over the next year, there will be a greater emphasis on encouraging social care providers to engage with the campaign directly. Resource from the Communications Team has also supported ACS as it undertakes a radical redesign of social care services in Suffolk in reaction to the Government’s initial white paper proposals. While the Government’s proposed reforms have been postponed, ACS has decided to continue with this transformation – focusing on individual payments and providing a care brokerage service to those who self-fund their own care in Suffolk.

Other notable work in 2022/23 included the annual Travel to Work Survey, and involvement with the Fire Community Risk Management Plan.

The Communications Team has a number of high-profile consultations and surveys already planned for 2023/24, including our Staff Survey, Travel to Work Survey, County Deal consultation, and various active travel projects including a ‘Mini Holland’ consultation in Woodbridge.

I remain confident that Suffolk County Council is positively predisposed to meaningful engagement with Suffolk residents and county council staff, and takes views into consideration when making decisions. Processes for engaging stakeholders are appropriate and an ethos of continuous service improvement exists, which helps to build on existing practice.





EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION



RICHARD CRACKNELL

Assistant Director of Public Health and Communities

The Strategic Equalities and Inclusion Board (SEIB) comprises of councillors, senior managers, trade union representatives, staff network leads and key EDI leads from across the organisation. The board is chaired by the Cabinet Lead for Equalities and Inclusion who has oversight of the Council's activities for this area of work.

This year's key focus has been on embedding the corporate Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) objectives (agreed in January 2022) and increasing engagement with EDI initiatives and communications across the organisation. Work has also progressed on embedding EDI in procurement and commissioning processes as part of the Social Value Ask and reviewing the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process.

The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) has been working with the Race Equality Lead to deliver on the Council's Race Equality Action Plan objectives. This work is being overseen by the Race Equality Oversight Group, chaired by the Corporate Leadership Team EDI lead and supported by the Race Equality Lead and the Black and Asian Staff Network.

The EDI Team works closely with the Directorate EDI Leads and their EDI Champions to develop and implement the Directorate EDI Action Plans. The growing network of cross-County Council EDI and Race Equality Champions is delivering an increasing number of EDI initiatives and EDI communications within Directorates, as well as providing an important resource to help develop and deliver the Directorate EDI Action Plans.

The number of Staff Networks has increased to twelve, with around 1,000 members, representing various protected characteristics within the organisation, and offer support to individuals within these networks. Staff Network Leads are integral to voicing concerns raised in their groups to their CLT partners (all Staff Networks have an identified CLT Lead partner), as well as showcasing the County Council as an employer of choice in Suffolk, recently being involved in the selection process for a new Deputy Chief Executive and reporting to both SEIB and to Scrutiny Committee.

Every staff member is expected to have an EDI objective in their annual Personal Development Review and there is a comprehensive set of EDI related e-learning, webinars, and policies to support this work area. The EDI Objectives have been spot-surveyed to assess their quality and relevance and the Mandatory Training ask for 2022/23 included three EDI related e-learning modules.

This year, the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process, which is used to ensure the Council is paying due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty, has added an assessment-criteria relating to socio-economic deprivation and has used the EIA training to encourage more co-production with people with protected characteristics. All Directorates have increased their communications around encouraging the completions of EIAs for all policy and service changes as well as for procurement and commissioning activities.

In March 2023, Scrutiny Committee focused on the ways in which the Council is working to achieve EDI as an employer, and the progress it is making.

Overall, processes are in place to enable the Council to meet its legal duties under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), and the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011. The Council recognises its statutory duties and recognises the rule of law, including that the PSED is non-delegable, so it always remains the responsibility of the Council.



SAFETY, HEALTH & WELLBEING



MIKE LEAKE

Head of Health & Safety

The Council continues to benchmark its Safety, Health and Wellbeing (SHAW) Strategy and performance through internal assurance activities and externally through the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Occupational Health and Safety awards scheme and the Healthy Workplace Awards scheme. In 2023, RoSPA awarded the Council the Gold Medal award for the eighth consecutive year.

The Safety, Health and Wellbeing service provides competent advice to the Council as required by Regulation 7 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

In accordance with Section 2(7) of the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, the Council has robust levels of Corporate Health and Safety communication arrangements through the SHAW Board, which has representation from the Corporate Leadership Team, Senior Managers and Unions. The quarterly board meetings continue to deliver clear strategic outcomes and appropriate Health and Safety communication channels to all Staff and Councillors.

The SHAW Strategy for 22-25 continues to drive measured, continuous improvements in the Council's arrangements through appropriate trend analysis, specifically relating to the four key priorities: Procurement and Contract Management; Schools; Supporting Wellbeing culture in SCC (the Council's corporate staff health and wellbeing agenda); and Internal/External Assurance.





WHOLLY OWNED COMPANIES

Since an Audit Committee meeting in November 2022, there has been a significant development in the set-up of Suffolk Group Holdings. Following an external governance review, a programme of work was completed to define the role and functions of Suffolk Group Holdings. The outcome of this was that the three principal subsidiaries of Suffolk Group Holdings (Concertus, Vertas and OPUS) will work more closely together under the trading name 'Vertas Group'.

The changes in the structure of the subsidiaries of Suffolk Group Holdings have not materially altered the governance arrangements.

The Suffolk Group Holdings Limited Board continues to meet quarterly, namely in June, August, and December 2022 and in February 2023. In the run-up to Board meetings a series of meeting take place. These discuss areas for development, upcoming requirements, and performance issues across each of the wholly owned companies and are attended by key SCC clients from across the Council. This has led to stronger relationships, greater transparency and accountability, and greater understanding for the Council and the wholly owned companies at both an operational and strategic level.

Cllr Robert Everitt, as the Council's representative on the Suffolk Group Holdings Board, is briefed by the Head of Assets and Investment based on the feedback received from the meetings described above. The briefing is also produced as a written document. The Chief Financial (s151) Officer, Monitoring Officer and Deputy Chief Executive also attend these meetings, where possible.

Following the Suffolk Group Holdings Limited Board meeting, the senior managers from Vertas, Concertus and Opus meet with the Suffolk County Council Shareholder Group. The Shareholder Group is chaired by Cllr Lance Stanbury and made up of five Conservative Councillors and one Councillor from the Green, Liberal Democrat and Independent opposition group.

An Audit and Risk Committee has been set up for Suffolk Group Holdings, chaired by Robert Coyle. The Audit and Risk Committee consists of three members who were recruited based on their skills and experience. The committee meets on a quarterly basis, with additional meetings as and when required.

Aside from the shareholder feedback, the Head of Assets and Investment continues to meet with senior managers in Vertas, Concertus and OPUS on a regular basis to ensure issues are resolved in a timely way and as part of ongoing partnership dialogue.

The changes to the Group this year provide an opportunity to develop and improve relationships further during 2022/23. This includes a review of the partnership agreement (deferred from 2021/22 to allow the Vertas Group changes to be established), and a review of how feedback for the Shareholder Group is collected and presented to improve transparency on current performance and cover a wider range of SCC clients.

It has been another challenging year for the group. However there have been clear improvements in the governance of the Vertas Group, both internally and from a client perspective. The dividend return to SCC for 2022/23 is £1.5m.

MATT WEST

Head of Assets and Investment





HOUSING JOINT VENTURE - EDMUNDHAM DEVELOPMENTS

The Housing Joint Venture (Edmundham Developments) is a 50-50 limited liability partnership with Lovell Partnerships. Contractual negotiations for the Joint Venture concluded in July 2022.

The structure and legal provisions of the Joint Venture have been established to provide protection for the Council (e.g., to protect its land interests) and commercial certainty for the Joint Venture.

There are six representatives on the Joint Venture Member Board made up of three from each of the two partners. The chair of the Joint Venture is rotated annually, and the Member Board meets every two months. The Council is represented by a Councillor nominated by the Leader, the Deputy Chief Executive, and the Chairman of Suffolk Group Holdings.

The Council already has a Housing Board, which was established in 2019 to oversee the Housing Programme. Its purpose and membership were amended to reflect the revised governance requirements since the establishment of the Joint Venture.

The Housing Board is chaired by the Assistant Director for Housing, Planning & Growth and has two roles: to direct and oversee the Council's client-side role on the Joint Venture; and to continue to oversee delivery of the Housing Programme.

Construction works at the first site, for 108 dwellings in West Row, is expected to begin towards the end of 2023.

A series of KPIs have been agreed, including financial measures, housing completion measures, quality measures and safety measures. These will be reported in future years once the Joint Venture begins trading. An independent assurance process will also be in place to ensure these KPIs are robust.

Previous reports to Cabinet have set out the Housing Programme scope and approach, the business case for the JV, and the conclusion of the JV procurement. In addition, the governance arrangements were reported to the Audit Committee in November 2022.

The progress and performance of the Joint Venture will be reported on annually to the Audit Committee.

ROB HANCOCK

Head of Housing, Growth & Planning





EXTERNAL ASSURANCE

1. All of Suffolk County Council's children's homes have also been rated as 'Good' by Ofsted.
2. Suffolk's SEND system (county council and health services) continues to be monitored by the Department for Education and NHS England and this remains an area of priority for improvement.
3. Suffolk Youth Justice Service (YJS) received an overall rating of 'Requires improvement' in 2022 following a joint inspection, led by HM Inspectorate of Probation. Joint inspections are undertaken with colleagues from the police, social care, education and health sector. The inspection found that there was room for improvement over children's safety and wellbeing or the risk they may pose to others. In addition, improvement was needed in the health and social care support for some young people who have been in custody. Inspectors did commend the positive work the service is doing in response to the criminal exploitation of children in the area.
4. The Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership ensures arrangements are in place for safeguarding adults and children with care and support needs to minimise risk of harm, adopting a zero tolerance to abuse and neglect. Safeguarding is more than protection. It also means protecting the safety, independence and wellbeing of children and adults with care and support needs. This involves a statutory duty to conduct case reviews of known or suspected abuse, neglect, or harm. The reviews provide an opportunity to learn lessons and improve practice.
5. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspects England's Fire and Rescue Services. The inspection process examines how effective and efficient services are at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks. Moreover, all Fire and Rescue Services are required to publish an Annual Statement of Assurance that sets out financial, governance, performance, and operational arrangements. The Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service 2021/22 Inspection Report was published in January 2023, with the service rated "Good" for its effectiveness and how well it manages staff.

The outcomes from all external inspections are shared with the relevant Director or Chief Executive and usually have action plans that will need consideration and monitoring by senior leadership teams to ensure recommendations and areas identified for improvement are actioned within satisfactory timescales. Most external inspections will conclude with a final written report that is published in the public domain - usually on the inspection team's website.



ACTION PLAN FOR 2023/24

Actions planned for 2023-24 to further strengthen the Council's governance, alongside the standing arrangements already in place are:

Area	Governance matters identified	Lead Officer
Corporate Ambitions	Deliver actions set out within the 2023-24 Annual Plan in relation to the Council's four objectives: promoting and supporting the health and wellbeing of all people in Suffolk; strengthening our local economy; protecting and enhancing our environment; providing value for money for the Suffolk taxpayer.	Nicola Beach
Corporate Governance	Appoint a second independent member to the Audit Committee.	Nigel Inniss
Finance	Work with Cabinet and CLT to review the 2023-24 budget and financial challenges, given the excessive cost of inflation and the impact on services from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To develop the 2024-25 budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy addressing these challenges, continued demand pressures on Council services, and impact of government reforms/policies.	Louise Aynsley
Finance	Undertake an assessment of compliance against the requirements of the CIPFA Financial Management Code and report the outcome to Audit Committee.	Louise Aynsley
Finance	Continue to review the role of the budget manager, guidance and training following the full implementation of Oracle Fusion. Identify any areas where individuals are struggling to meet their responsibilities and develop and provide targeted training to help them overcome this.	Louise Aynsley
Counter Fraud	Review and update fraud awareness resources available to staff on MySCC website and create an e-learning module.	Christos Constantinou
Risk Management	Successfully manage the upgrade to JCAD Risk Management, ensuring that risk owners are trained, and that key monitoring and reporting processes are maintained.	Caroline Davison
Human Resources	Ensure all County Council staff complete their relevant mandatory training programme for 2023-24.	Corporate Leadership Team



ACTION PLAN FOR 2023/24

cont...

Area	Governance matters identified	Lead Officer
Human Resources	Further development to realise the potential of Oracle Fusion for HR, managers and staff.	Jeanette Bray
Human Resources	Commence delivery of the 2023-27 Workforce Strategy. Organisation-wide promotion of the Strategy, enabling directorates to use as an anchor for any service-specific plans. Development and delivery of year one action plan to progress the Strategy.	Jeanette Bray
Human Resources	Delivery of corporate staff engagement survey within new survey contract, providing managers with an early digital dashboard of team results. Ensure a coordinated approach to response, action planning and follow-up.	Jeanette Bray
Human Resources	HR Policies, standard correspondence, and toolkits: Systematic review to update and improve content quality, accessibility and consistency of look and tone.	Jeanette Bray
Information Governance	Implement additional measures to minimise the number of security incidents occurring, including targeting additional training for those services where incidents are most prevalent.	Peter Knight
Information Governance	Review and update the Council's suite of information governance policies to reflect organisational changes and wider national developments.	Peter Knight
Information Governance	Establish a Data Ethics Advisory Panel to assist the Council with upholding the principles of the Ethical Data Stewardship Charter.	Peter Knight
Information Governance	Complete the review of the Council's legacy data held at the Records Management Centre, to ensure these records are not held for longer than they should be.	Peter Knight
Procurement	Consider the results of the innovative LGA Procurement Diagnostic Tool to assess and implement areas of improvement.	Matt West



ACTION PLAN FOR 2023/24

cont...

Area	Governance matters identified	Lead Officer
Equalities & Inclusion	Delivery of Workforce Equalities report. and pay gap reports for gender, race and for the first time, disability.	Jeanette Bray
Equalities & Inclusion	Review staff engagement survey results by protected characteristics and develop tailored action plan to achieve progress in areas where improvement needed.	Jeanette Bray
Equalities & Inclusion	Ensure that every Directorate is delivering on their EDI Action Plans, with the full support of their Directorate Management Teams, to achieve the Council's three corporate EDI priorities.	Richard Cracknell
Wholly Owned Companies	To put in place governance arrangements within the County Council to work with the new Housing Joint Venture.	Matt West
Wholly Owned Companies	Draft and implement a new partnership agreement now the Vertas Group is established.	Matt West
External Inspections	Implement actions arising from external inspections (e.g., SEND review; Suffolk Youth Justice Service inspection; HMICFRS inspection).	Various officers
Government Policy & Reform	Recognise and, where appropriate, take action on the impact of new and emerging government policy, reform and consultation (e.g., Next steps to put People at the Heart of Care; Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, including County Deals).	Various officers

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