



ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

2020/21



Suffolk
County Council

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FOREWORD

The last 12 months have been extraordinary, and the organisation's work has been dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Suffolk's first Coronavirus case was recorded in early March 2020 and since that point, the County Council, with its Suffolk partners, has been in response mode. The county's Local Resilience Forum (LRF) stood up its Strategic Co-ordinating Group and associated response structures and the County Council established a Business Continuity Forum with Tactical Management Teams for each Directorate.

Successful arrangements have been put in place to source and distribute PPE, set-up and manage local Covid testing arrangements, support the national NHS vaccination programme and identify and care for the most vulnerable residents in Suffolk. It has been a torrid and tragic year for many people, and Suffolk has come together through our response.

In terms of its own governance, staff were sent to work from home from 23 March 2020, in line with the national lockdown. All Councillor meetings have also continued online. New policies and arrangements have been introduced by IT, HR, Procurement, Property and Health and Safety teams and there have been monthly financial reports to Government focussing on the additional funding allocated. A multi-service 'Workplace Planning Group' has been introduced to discuss, plan and address service delivery taking into consideration the new property, people, technology and health and safety challenges presented by the pandemic.

Throughout all this, the functions of the Council charged with governance continued to ensure that the Council's operational arrangements were in place to keep staff and Councillors safe whilst performing their day to day duties. There have been notable achievements this year such as the implementation of Oracle Fusion, the Council's new online management system covering finance, procurement, HR, Payroll and Health and Safety functions. This was successfully implemented whilst staff continued to work remotely.

Elsewhere, a review of the Council's approach to risk management has been completed with recommendations agreed.

This year's Annual Governance Statement conveys the breadth of work undertaken by staff across the Council to comply with the various standards in place for public services whilst responding to the pandemic. The Action Plan sets out additional actions we will be taking alongside our ongoing focus on the law and standards in order to deliver continuous improvement.



CHRIS BALLY
Deputy Chief Executive,
Suffolk County Council



APPROVAL OF THE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

We have been advised on the implications of 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.

Whilst COVID-19 will undoubtedly have impacted on governance, risk, and the internal control environment during 2020/21, the Annual Governance Statement shows that our high standards have been maintained and no significant issues identified.

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

We are satisfied that these actions will deliver 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 it carries out its duties in a lawful manner, with a view to continuous improvement. It is also responsible for ensuring that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used efficiently and effectively.

In discharging this responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place arrangements for the governance of the services it delivers and 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) and SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers) Framework.

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: Vertas, Concertus Property & Design Consultants (Concertus), and Opus People Solutions (Opus), are incorporated within this Annual Governance Statement.

Good Governance is about: "Achieving the intended outcomes, while acting in the public interest at all times."

Governance looks at 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 the organisation:

- Operates in a lawful, open, inclusive, and honest manner
- Spends public money wisely
- Has effective arrangements in place to manage risk
- Meets the needs of Suffolk's communities
- Strives to continuously improve 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 and 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 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 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 compliments 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 2021 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 leadership by developing and keeping under review the corporate priorities of the authority. These priorities set a clear direction for what is important politically and how that will drive the work of Council services every day.

The priorities for 2020/21 were:

- I. Inclusive Growth (Improving Suffolk's economic productivity, levels of educational attainment and building more homes to benefit local people)
 - II. Health, Care & Wellbeing (Caring for Suffolk's vulnerable residents, enabling everyone to live long, healthy and fulfilling lives)
 - III. Efficient & Effective Public Services (Changing the way the Council operates to meet customers' needs and balance the budget despite diminishing resources, increasing demand, and changing customer expectations).
2. The global Coronavirus pandemic hit the UK in early 2020 with Suffolk recording its first case in March 2020. Covid-19 had a significant impact on the priorities of the Council in 2020/21 affecting spending, staffing and the use of Council resources. For 2021/22 'Living with COVID-19 and Suffolk's Recovery' will be an additional priority looking at how the Council will redesign and transform the way it works to deliver public services in response to COVID-19.
 3. There is an established integrated planning process which ensures Council services are delivered in accordance with its priorities and represent the best use of resources (the 2020/21 Business Plan was approved at the meeting of the County Council, alongside the budget, in February 2020).
 4. Performance is measured against corporate objectives.
 5. There is a 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.
 6. Codes of Conduct have been developed which define the standards of behaviour for Councillors and employees.



HOW THE COUNCIL WORKS

7. Within 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.
8. An 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. The Committee is also responsible for monitoring and maintaining the risk management framework to ensure the Council's financial and non-financial performance is properly monitored.
9. 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.
10. There are arrangements for whistleblowing and for receiving and investigating complaints from the public, supporting the measurement of the quality of services for users.
11. The Council seeks to keep communities informed, giving local people the opportunity to get involved in the decision making process, promoting local democracy; 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 Business Plan ■ Approves the Constitution (including 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 Committee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Supports and challenges the Council in carrying out it's 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, overseeing 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, being suitably qualified and experienced ensuring 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 Whistle blowing 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)
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



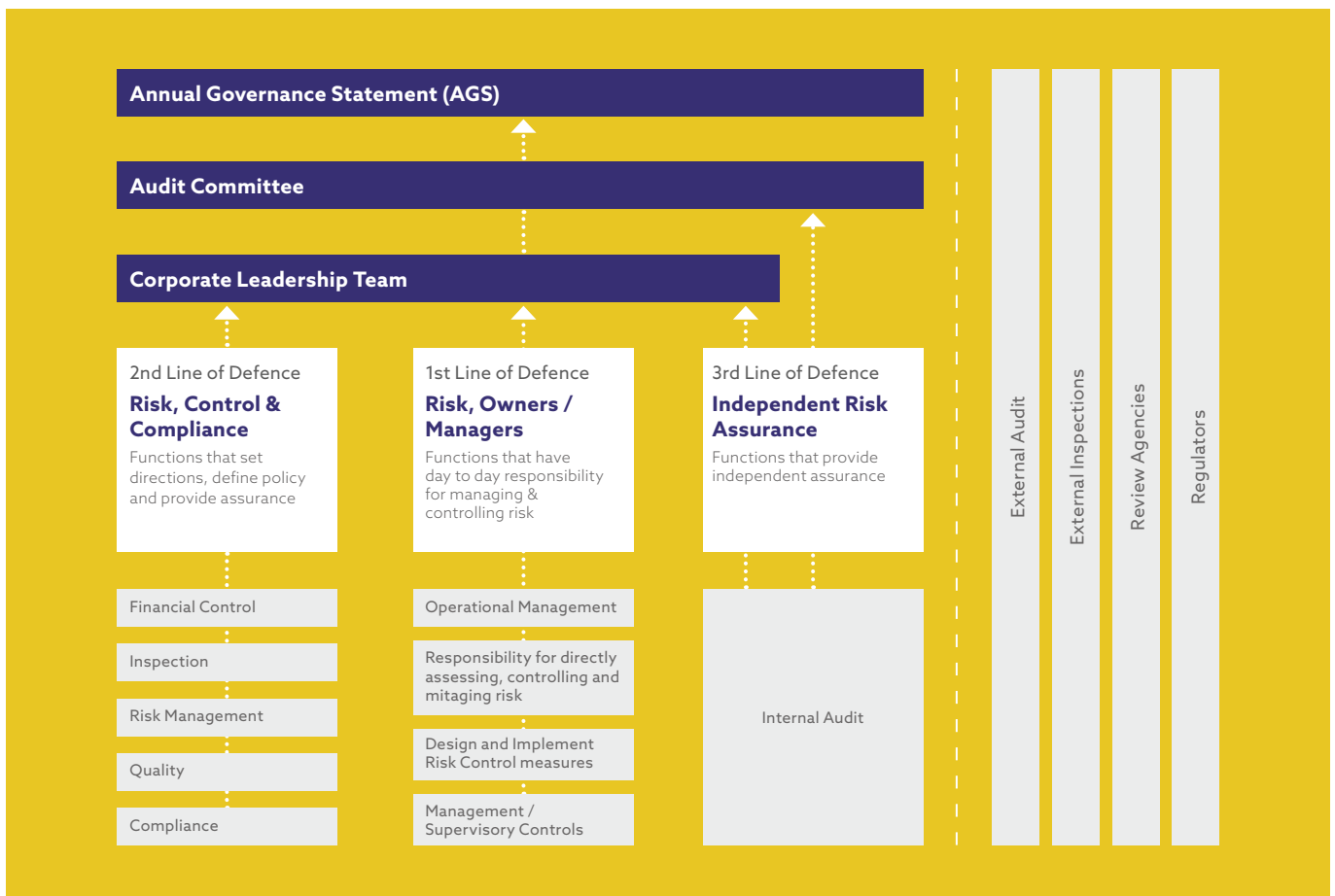
REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

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 '2nd Line of Defence' Officers relating to their areas of responsibility

The review of effectiveness is informed by the three lines of defence (i.e., from the executive managers within the Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment; the Head of Internal Audit; inspections made by external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates).

This is demonstrated here:





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



TIM RYDER

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 whilst respecting the rule of law. 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, Council and Cabinet meetings are webcast, and the public can participate in such meetings by asking questions or raising petitions.

The COVID-19 pandemic initially resulted in the suspension of normal decision-making processes of the Council. Meetings of Council, Cabinet and committees could not be held until the necessary legislation and technology was in place. Standing delegations to officers ensured that the Council was still able to operate. Working across the political groups, a protocol was agreed that supported the Chief Executive in her use of delegated emergency powers, ensuring that transparency of decision making remained. Decisions were published on the Council's website with responses from opposition

groups included. Where possible more contentious decisions were deferred.

Once Regulations were published by Government, the Council was able to adopt a procedure for remote meetings that complied with the legislation and continued the commitment to corporate governance. Where decisions had been taken in the absence of formal meetings, these were noted by Council and Cabinet at the first available meeting. The Audit Committee were briefed on the interim arrangements and the procedures to be followed while restrictions continued and were satisfied that the necessary standards were being maintained.

During the year, Council agreed updates to the Constitution to revise Financial Regulations, the Corporate Property Framework, the Pension Fund Governance Statement, and the Planning Code of Conduct, to create an Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, and to recognise the Council's responsibilities within the Prevent agenda.

The Audit Committee considered the Annual Standards Report in March 2021. During 2020/21, there were six incidents that resulted in Code of Conduct complaints against Councillors. One incident resulted in over 650 complaints that the Code of Conduct had been breached. As the Councillor resigned, no investigation was undertaken. There were eight other complaints received. The Monitoring Officer concluded that two of these had resulted in a breach of the Code of Conduct with a local resolution. Counting the multiple complaints regarding the former Councillor as one complaint, this gives a total of 50 complaints since the current arrangements prescribed by the Localism Act 2011 were introduced in July 2012.



GOVERNANCE cont...

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) Annual Review Letter for the year ending 31 March 2020 was discussed at Audit Committee in September 2020. Of the 103 decisions made by the LGSCO during the reporting period of the Annual Review, 30 (29%) were forwarded for investigation of which 23 (77%) were upheld compared to 71% last year. The remaining seven complaints were not upheld.

Elections for the County Council took place in May 2021. A comprehensive induction programme has been arranged for all Councillors, whether returning or new to the authority. This will incorporate the Council's governance arrangements including decision making, the Council's values, the Code of Conduct, and sessions relating to equality and inclusion, safeguarding, and health and safety. Specific training will be provided to cabinet members, chairmen of committees and committee members to ensure they have a full understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and how these contribute to the governance of the Council.

The ability of the Council to continue to demonstrate sound decision making during the pandemic, particularly during the initial period when meetings were not able to be held, is a testimony to the robust arrangements that the Council has implemented. It is the opinion of the Monitoring Officer, that the Council has complied with its Constitution and its corporate governance arrangements are sound.



VALUE FOR MONEY



LOUISE AYNSLEY
Chief Finance (s151) Officer

The statutory role of the Chief Finance 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's 2020-21 budget, set in February 2020, was significantly impacted as the Council has needed to respond to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government has provided significant additional funding of £96.8 million during 2020-21 to deal with the financial impact of COVID-19 on Council services. Specific grants (amounting to £52.4 million) are being managed by the appropriate Directorates in accordance with the grant rules. A full review of all grants has been undertaken within Finance to ensure compliance with 2020-21 financial statements.

During 2020/21, regular COVID-19 reporting has been submitted to Government on forecast costs for additional expenditure, and loss of income. The Council has submitted 11 returns with the final 2020/21 return providing the year's outturn position for the financial impact of COVID-19, identifying £28.6 million of additional expenditure and £5.9 million of lost income net of specific grants and contributions.

Quarterly reporting to Cabinet on the Council's financial position has continued during the year, including the reporting of COVID-19 spend and funding received.

The Council has a Budget Strategy which focuses on the need to take a medium-term view of the Council's budget; on meeting the Council's Corporate Priorities and associated Directorate Business Plans; and rising to the challenge presented by an ongoing response to and recovery from COVID-19. A key element of this strategy is its Transformation Programmes which seek to develop services to lower costs and manage future demand. In addition, the strategy is based on the need to maintain adequate reserves available to manage any unexpected changes to spending and funding plans, recognising that reserves should not be used to cover ongoing gaps between expenditure and funding, and should be replenished as soon as practicable.

Continuing to follow this strategy, the Council has been able to set a one-year budget for 2021-22, taking into consideration the challenges and uncertainties currently facing the Council due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the future impact on service demands and delivery. As the Council remains generally in a sound position over the short term, this has enabled the use of reserves in 2021-22 instead of cuts or reductions to core services, enabling the Council to focus on the pressing need to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) projects an increasing budget gap from 2022-23, necessitating urgent action over the coming months to develop plans to ensure financial sustainability.

The Council continues to enhance its work on the Capital Strategy providing rigour to the processes for approving, assessing the affordability of, and monitoring of the capital programme.

VALUE FOR MONEY cont...

In October 2019, CIPFA published The CIPFA Financial Management Code (FM code), designed to support good practice in financial management and to assist local authorities in demonstrating their financial sustainability. An early review of the guidance and initial assessment was undertaken by officers prior to the commencement of the COVID-19 crisis with no major concerns arising. A full review of the Code will be undertaken in 2021/22.

The opinion of the Chief Finance 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 re-course for the Chief Finance 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 whilst enabling the Council to meet its priorities within a robust financial framework.





INTERNAL AUDIT



PETER FROST
Head of Internal Audit

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

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

During 2020/21, Internal Audit examined key governance systems alongside normal audit work to assess how the internal control environment has had to change and adjust to the effects and demands of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result of the reviews, the following conclusions were made:

- Internal Audit has not identified significant variations to controls and the control framework has transferred well to aspects such as remote working
- Changes to working practices undoubtedly have occurred but there is little indication of reduced control and, in some instances, the changes have improved the efficiency of processes with automation often replacing previous manual / physical activity

- Where changes have been enforced, staff have maintained a clear understanding of the basis of control and, in most instances, created solutions which have maintained the integrity of the process. Resulting efficiency gains need to be recognised and maintained.

92% of internal audit work completed during 2020/21 found an acceptable level of assurance (substantial or reasonable) over the design and operation of the services, systems and processes audited. For those audit reviews that have presented significant concern, actions have been agreed to improve controls and are closely monitored until such a time they are addressed.

The Head of Internal Audit has performed his duties in accordance with CIPFA's guidance on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit.

The Head of Internal Audit is required to provide an independent opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's governance, risk, and control framework and therefore the extent to which the Council can rely on it. In giving the audit opinion, it should be noted that assurance can never be absolute. The most that can be provided is a reasonable assurance that there are no major weaknesses in risk management, governance, and control processes.

Based on the findings of the managed audit and governance reviews carried out throughout 2020/21 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 control environment provides reasonable assurance that the significant risks facing the Authority are addressed and financial administrative systems are effective. 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 Finance 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. A number of policies that make up the Council's anti-fraud governance arrangements are in place and regularly reviewed.

Within 2020/21, a Counter Fraud Service was launched within Internal Audit to work solely on fraud related matters, increasing capacity and capability.

An internal audit review of the Council's anti-fraud arrangements was conducted against the Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally checklist, resulting with an opinion of Reasonable Assurance and actions raised to improve on certain areas.

A new Counter Fraud Strategy covering the period 2021-23 was developed and approved by the Corporate Leadership Team in March 2021.

The 2020/21 counter-fraud action plan was delivered including complying to all statutory requirements of the Cabinet Office' National Fraud Initiative exercise, fraud awareness training delivered, and investigations carried out in line with the Council's Fraud Response Plan.

The Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Service were named winners of the 2020 Fighting Fraud & Corruption Locally 'Acknowledge' award - recognising 'excellence in Local Government Fraud Risk Management, recognising the importance of acknowledging and pro-actively managing fraud risks in order to prevent and detect fraud losses.'

COVID-19 has not significantly impacted on the Council's fraud risks and this is being kept under constant review.





CORPORATE PERFORMANCE



PAUL EMENY

Performance & Risk Manager

The Council continues to provide statutory data returns to Government in accordance with Single Data List requirements, notably Social Care and Education services. This process provides accountability, transparency, and evidence to support the regulatory and external inspection process.

The Corporate Performance Reporting Board oversees and reviews the Corporate Performance Report every quarter in advance of presentation and discussion at Corporate Leadership Team and Joint Leadership Team.

The Scrutiny Committee receives executive summaries of each Corporate Performance Report to help inform its forward work programme and areas of focus.

The Council shows its commitment to transparency through the publication of the Corporate Performance Report on the Council's website, in accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015.

Directorate leadership teams continue to report and have oversight of performance issues within their respective areas of responsibility. The directorate process aligns to the corporate model but reporting frameworks do vary dependent on business need.

The Council continues to share performance information with other authorities to support benchmarking tools and activities. Suffolk Fire Service publish comparative value for money information as part of their annual statement of assurance. And Children's Services routinely share performance information with the Eastern Region Benchmarking Network which promotes collaboration and the sharing of good practice.

The Council has refreshed its corporate guidance on managing performance and this is available to all managers on the staff intranet site.

Whilst COVID-19 has had both negative and positive impacts on service delivery, the process of reporting and managing performance has continued throughout the pandemic (at both directorate and corporate level). Specific examples of how COVID-19 has impacted on Council performance were highlighted in the Corporate Performance Report to the Audit Committee in March 2021. The impact of social distancing restrictions on front line services, the impact on the way the organisation interacts with its customers, and the deployment of staff resources into key roles to support the organisation's response to the pandemic were all referenced as examples.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the external inspection / quality assurance process, most notably Ofsted and CQC who have suspended most routine visits to settings such as schools and care homes until further notice.





RISK MANAGEMENT



PAUL EMENY

Performance & Risk Manager

The Council follows an 'Active Risk Management' approach to managing its risks, a flexible framework with a focus on actively identifying the likelihood of something happening, and its impact on the organisation delivering its priorities and services.



The Corporate Risk Register (CRR) and high-level risks are recorded on JCAD Core, industry standard software that records, monitors, and reports risks and mitigation actions in a structured and consistent way.

The Council undertakes an annual review of its high-level risks to assess their relevance and suitability and make recommendations to the relevant directorate and risk owner. The annual review is an opportunity to consider high-level risks at a cross-departmental level to moderate and assess appropriateness, balance and coverage for all significant issues facing the organisation and alignment to the Council's new business plan.

Throughout 2020/21 all high-level risks have been regularly reported and reviewed by senior management teams (at both corporate and directorate level).

All high-level risks have been reviewed in response to the potential impact of COVID-19.

In March 2021, the Audit Committee endorsed a series of improvements to the risk management process. These recommendations followed a series of officer / Councillor workshops held in late 2020 to review the current risk management process.





HUMAN RESOURCES



JEANETTE BRAY

Head of Human Resources, Performance & Change

The Council has in place a comprehensive set of workforce policies and procedures which are supported by a full range of detailed guidance and clear processes. These are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they deliver the agreed outcomes and priorities for Suffolk County Council, reflect changes in legislation and incorporate best practice. These are all available and accessible to staff and line managers through AskHR, with the HR service providing additional direction and guidance where needed. Changes have been regularly brought to the attention of staff and managers through weekly messaging in InsideSCC and through monthly manager webinars.

The Staff Survey, undertaken in 2020 provided strong evidence that there are high levels of confidence in leadership and management across the Council including the management of health, safety, and wellbeing for staff. Overall, the staff engagement index level increased significantly with high and improved levels of job satisfaction among staff. The survey was extended to include a further breakdown on equalities questions and specific questions regarding homeworking and management of the pandemic.

Absence management has been closely monitored throughout the year with some adjustments to policy to accommodate COVID-19-related absence. Overall, absence levels have been maintained at significantly

lower levels compared with previous years across all services.

Staff performance management is well-embedded across the Council, as evidenced from staff survey results with the link now in place between performance and reward for staff.

During 2020/21, the Council launched the new WE ASPIRE values which had been reviewed and refreshed through extensive engagement with staff. Supporting resources have been developed on MySCC and work has continued to develop a behaviour-based framework as a new tool to support performance and development reviews.

Monthly webinars to support operational managers have been held with high attendance (+400) as an addition to the established HR support available to all staff through on-line resources and aligned HR officers. MyLearning provides a range of developmental support aligned to the 21st century public servant. These resources have been updated and extended across this year to support, inform, and develop managers to ensure delivery whilst balancing the health, safety and wellbeing needs of their teams during these challenging times.

The shift towards homeworking for many staff was significantly enabled by the flexible working practices and 'Free Me' working arrangements that were already in place. A full catalogue of questions and answers was quickly established and has been regularly extended and updated for managers and staff to provide clear direction and guidance on COVID-19-related issues, changes, and their implementation. These have been communicated widely and manager webinars set up to provide a dynamic opportunity to respond to concerns and issues.

HR has led the workplace planning group to ensure the safe management and control of COVID-19 secure workplaces, introducing a process for office access and a training requirement to ensure all health and safety obligations were met. This work is ongoing and is moving on to a review of new ways of working.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY



KRISHNA YERGOL
Chief Technology Officer

The Council's Technology Strategy is enabling the Council to become a modern, information orientated organisation which maximises the benefits of technology for the people of Suffolk.

Alongside Council operations, the Suffolk IT Service provides support to partners including Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils, Vertas and individual Schools and Academies.

The Council continues to collaborate with other public service organisations, including health colleagues. Strategic engagement with directorate leadership teams is providing good strategic awareness of organisational needs and pressures, helping them to develop a trusted partnership with colleagues across the organisation.

The IT commissioning process offers representation from all directorates and facilitates robust discussions around the management of service-led priorities within the directorates, helping to establish appropriate sponsorship and ownership of work that is commissioned.

Like other services during 2020/21, the IT Service has had to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and support the Council to adapt. The service has implemented core technology infrastructure improvements to allow colleagues to work from home and enable them to continue to deliver frontline services.

There is now less face to face interaction (i.e. no IT platform) and more remote support. The IT service has supported the Council in delivering new ways of working. This includes delivering hybrid meetings as well as transformational ways to support services building on from changes due to COVID-19.

As the pandemic progressed, the service responded to emerging needs and mobilised the Public Health COVID Business intelligence platform, successfully integrating with other health and care partners in the region. It carried out development work to enable the Public Health Test and Trace services and developed and rolled out a new COVID-secure device process with support from Vertas. This has enabled the IT service to support around 2000 tablet / laptop devices..

As well as responding to the pandemic, IT has continued to improve with the roll out the Council's new collaboration platform (Teams) to all the workforce whilst successfully replacing the old Skype for Business platform. The team has also worked to introduce the new Oracle Fusion system and a new storage and backup platform that will provide a disaster recovery capability and reduce exposure to ransomware style threats, amongst other improvements.





INFORMATION GOVERNANCE



PETER KNIGHT
Head of Information Governance

Information governance is overseen by the Corporate Information Governance Board (CIGB), ensuring the Council has effective arrangements in place. The CIGB is supported by service-specific information governance boards or information governance leads.

The Council has several key individuals who have specific roles and responsibilities with regard to information.

- Senior Information Risk Owner – overall responsibility for the organisation’s policy (undertaken by the Deputy Chief Executive)
- Head of Information Governance – leads the team that develops the overall information policy and assurance framework, provides advice, guidance and training for staff, and monitors compliance
- Data Protection Officer & Compliance Manager – oversees compliance with legislative requirements and manages the relationship with the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO)
- Caldicott Guardians – senior officers in Adult & Community Services and Children & Young People’s Services responsible for protecting the confidentiality and use of people’s health and care data

The Council is subject to a number of external assurance regimes, including 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.

Increasingly citizens are aware of their rights to access information about themselves which under data protection law has resulted in an increased number of Subject Access Requests (SARs) received by the Council (279 in 2020/21). This has placed considerable pressure on the organisation and achieving statutory compliance rates has proved a challenge (63.3% for 2020/21).

The Council receives a high number of Freedom of Information (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) requests; despite a short-lived dip in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council received 1,197 information requests in 2020/21, but the compliance rate for meeting statutory deadlines remains high (94.5% for 2020/21).

The Council has seen a significant increase in the overall number of Security incidents this year compared to previous years (458 in 2020/21 compared to 336 in 2019/20), although there has been a drop in the number of more serious incidents (149 in 2020/21 compared to 183 in 2019/20). Nine data breaches have been serious enough to require notification to the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO). The majority of data breaches are human error, such as information being sent to the wrong person via email or in the post. Additional measures are being introduced to minimise such breaches.

During 2020/21, updated mandatory e-learning training on information security was delivered to all staff. Over 98% of staff have completed the training. Security incident reporting and management arrangements have been strengthened in response to the increase in data breaches and The Council’s corporate and service-specific Privacy Notices have been reviewed to ensure citizens and customers are informed about use of their personal data.

Information risk assessment processes have been revised and over 120 Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) have been undertaken in 2020/21.

Reviews of Council records held at the Records Management Centre have been undertaken to ensure this information is not held for longer than it should be.



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 whilst supporting the Council's policies and in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

The procurement response to the Commissioning, Procurement and Contract Management Assurance Framework and progress on agreed actions to strengthen assurance has continued to be reviewed quarterly with Internal Audit.

The Procurement Team has simplified the way Council colleagues can request procurement support whilst also adding additional checks to ensure that key priorities such as working to Carbon Net Zero and Modern Slavery have been considered.

To support the Climate Emergency commitment to be Carbon Net Zero by 2030 a Climate Emergency Commercial Ask has been developed to use with the Council's supply chain to reduce their carbon impact. This is supported by guidance for both suppliers and staff in commercial roles, including a contract management checklist and guidance to evaluate environmental social value bid responses. Commissioners requesting procurement support to tender contracts will now need to consider how they reduce the environmental impact of the contract and

take advice from the Environmental Team before the Procurement Team will undertake the tender.

The Procurement Team worked alongside other teams within the Council to support the implementation of Oracle Fusion - preparing and supporting User Acceptance Testing (UAT), developing training resources, user manuals and drop-in sessions.

From a COVID-19 perspective, the Procurement Team were heavily involved in the sourcing of suitable PPE; a 'once in a career challenge' of trying to buy safe and genuine goods from an untested market. The team formed a partnership with Trading Standards colleagues to add rigour and assurance to ensure the Council got what it was paying for.

The Team has also provided advice and guidance to the organisation around changes made to the Procurement Rules following centrally issued Procurement Policy Notices (PPNs) brought in to adjust procurement rules during COVID-19.

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 in response to COVID-19 and Brexit.

The recommendations for procurement teams in the MHCLG review "Local government procurement: fraud and corruption risk review" published in June 2020 were reviewed and actioned in collaboration with the Counter Fraud Manager.





COMMUNICATIONS



ANDREW ST. LEDGER
Head of Communications, Consultation & Media

Whilst much of the Council’s planned consultation activity was initially put on hold at the beginning of the pandemic, business as usual work recommenced by July 2020 and the Council was able to deliver important service consultations, including identifying additional provision for students with Special Education Needs and Disabilities.

All the Council’s high-profile priority projects and work have been supported, including (but not exclusively) Lowestoft’s Gull Wing bridge, fostering and adoption recruitment, the highways resurfacing programme, the creation of shared fire and police stations, the sale of Chilton Woods for housing, employment, and community facilities, setting the Council’s 2021/22 budget and support for the care market and schools during the pandemic.

In 2020/21, the team delivered several key surveys for the Council, including the 2020 Staff Survey, the annual Travel to Work survey and smaller surveys such as the New Ways of Working survey for elected members.

With colleagues from Public Health, BMG Research were commissioned to undertake quantitative research into public attitudes towards COVID-19 in Suffolk. The first tranche of this work is complete with further tracker surveys scheduled for later in 2021. This is greatly informing the understanding of

attitudes within the county compared with the rest of the country.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the communications and engagement activity planned for, and delivered by, the Council in 2020/21. In response to the major incident being declared, the Council worked with partners to mobilise a multi-agency resilience forum communications cell which led on communications and campaigning activities.

The Council has led the cell throughout much of the pandemic, creating and coordinating integrated business to business, and business to consumer, campaigns that make use of behavioural insights techniques and all available communications channels. This included county-wide residential mailouts, advertising campaigns, coordinated social media, public relations activity, stakeholder engagement and public opinion research.





EQUALITIES & INCLUSION



CHRISTINE GEESON
Head of Localities & Partnership

The Strategic Equalities and Inclusion Board (SEIB) comprised of Councillors, senior managers, Trades Union, and staff network representatives, is chaired by the Cabinet Lead for Equalities and Inclusion, and has oversight of the Council's activities for this area of work. A key area of work for this year was the development of a new corporate statement to demonstrate the Council's commitment to equalities and a review of the corporate equality objectives. These will be confirmed by the SEIB in April 2021.

The Corporate Leadership Team led the review of the Council's approach to race equality. This resulted in the development of a Race Equality Action Plan and agreement to create a dedicated Race Equality Officer post.

Core equalities and inclusion activities continued throughout the response to the Coronavirus outbreak, such as the EIA process which is used to ensure the Council is paying due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). 26% more EIA screenings were reviewed by the EIA Review Group in 2020-21 compared to the previous year. However, due to staff redeployment to support the Coronavirus response, some E&I pieces of work were delayed, including a portal of information to support managers, Councillors, and other staff to have positive conversations about difficult and challenging topics.





HEALTH & SAFETY



MIKE LEAKE

Head of Health & Safety

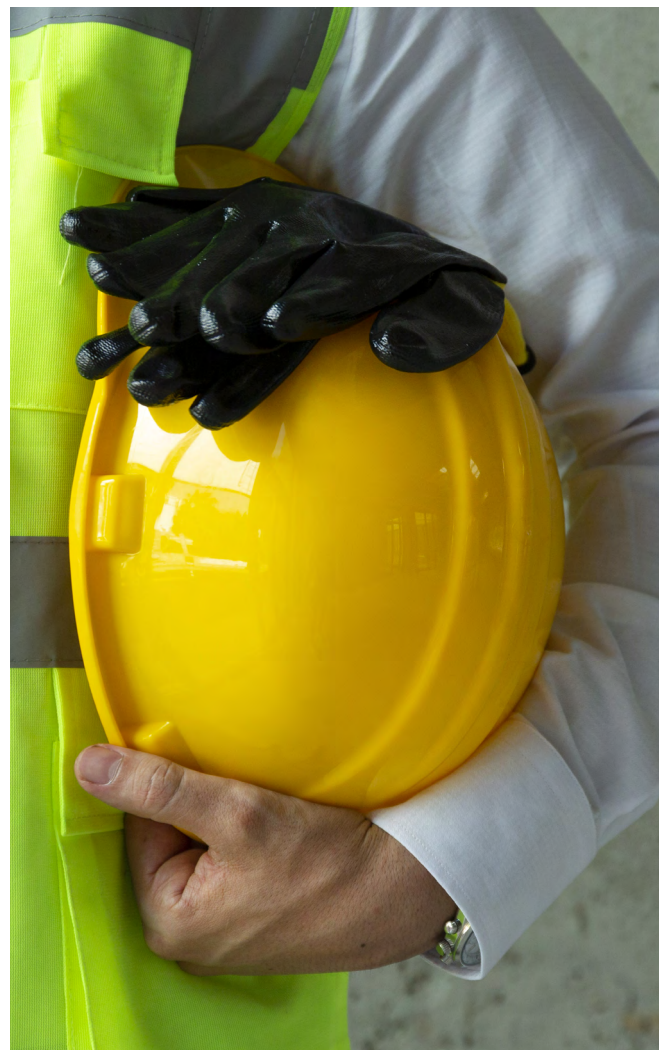
In accordance with Section 2(7) of the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, there is a Safety, Health and Wellbeing (SHAW) Board comprised of senior managers and Trades Union representatives which is chaired by a member of the Corporate Leadership Team. The functions of the SHAW Board have continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring that all COVID-19 Secure control measures have been embedded, updated, and reviewed throughout the organisation.

The SHAW Strategy 2019-22 has four themes which are Procurement and Contract Management, Schools, Supporting wellbeing and culture in SCC (the Council's corporate staff health and wellbeing programme) and Assurance.

An internal review of Health & Safety auditing systems has been undertaken with a view that such audits will be conducted across Directorates. In support of this a full review of all Health & Safety training provision has been taken to review all levels of H&S competence where required.

The Council continues to benchmark its health and safety performance through the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Occupational Health and Safety Award scheme. In 2020, RoSPA awarded the Council the 'Highly Commended in the Public Service & Local Government Sector' Award.

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





WHOLLY OWNED COMPANIES



MATT WEST

Head of Assets and Investment

In November 2020, the annual report on Suffolk Group Holdings was considered by the Audit Committee. At that meeting the Committee expressed their satisfaction with the governance and assurance arrangements in place with the Wholly owned Companies.

The Suffolk Group Holdings Limited Board meets quarterly and, in the run up to Board meetings, there are a series of briefings held in preparation. The Suffolk Group Holdings Limited Board met in February, June, September, November 2020 and in February 2021. Preceding each meeting there have been a series of meetings gathering feedback relating specifically from the Council’s clients to feed into the Board.

- Wholly Owned Companies’ Key Clients meeting. This is a dedicated meeting for key service representatives who commission work with Vertas and Concertus
- The contract leads for relationships with each of the individual companies meet with the Head of Assets and Investment to consider issues to raise with the Shareholder

- The Head of Assets and Investment meets with senior managers in Vertas, OPUS, and Concertus on a regular basis to ensure improvement and issues are resolved in a timely way and as part of ongoing dialogue

The Chief Finance (s151) Officer, Monitoring Officer, Deputy Chief Executive and Cllr Robert Whiting, as the Council representative on the Suffolk Group Holdings Board, are briefed by the Head of Assets and Investment based on the feedback received from the meetings above, and events and experience picked up in the last quarter. The Briefing is also produced as a written document.

Following the Suffolk Group Holdings Limited Board meeting, the Chief Executives from Vertas, Concertus and Opus meet with the Suffolk County Council Shareholder Group which consists of six Councillors, including Cllr Whiting, three further Conservative Councillors, one Labour Councillor and one Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Councillor. The Shareholder Group was chaired by Cllr Craig Rivett during 2020/21.

Overall, the past twelve months have been an incredibly challenging period for Suffolk Group Holdings Limited. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the business of Suffolk Group Holdings, affecting the delivery of its current five year financial plans. Reporting to the Shareholder Advisory Group during COVID-19 has advised that the 2020-21 dividend payable to the Council would be affected.

The expected dividend has therefore been adjusted from initial forecasts to reflect the challenging financial picture. Despite the pandemic, Suffolk Group Holdings Limited finds itself in a stable position. There are positives for Vertas, Concertus and Opus but it is too early to know what the longer-term effects of COVID-19 might be.



EXTERNAL ASSURANCE

1. The Annual Audit Letter was issued in March 2021 by the Council's external auditors (Ernst & Young) and provided assurance that the organisation has adequate arrangements in place to secure efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The 2019/20 Annual Audit Letter issued the Council with an unqualified audit.
2. Over the past 12 months COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the external inspection and quality assurance process, notably Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) who have suspended most routine visits to settings such as schools and care home settings until further notice.
3. The Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership makes sure there are arrangements for safeguarding people with care and support needs and acts 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.
4. In the second half of 2020, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) carried out COVID-19 thematic inspections remotely and involving engagement with members, service managers, and representative bodies. The inspections include a self-assessment survey, data collection, and other documentation. Suffolk was inspected in November and the appraisal letter published in January. Inspections do not have graded outcomes, however Suffolk's appraisal letter reflected positively on service and its staff.



ACTION PLAN FOR 2021/22

A number of new actions are planned for 2021/22 to further strengthen the Council's governance alongside the standing arrangements already in place.

Area	Governance matters identified	Lead Officer
Corporate Priorities	Deliver actions set out within the 2021/22 Business Plan. Whilst the Council will continue to deliver on its existing three priorities throughout 2021, a new specific priority for 2021/22 has been added which includes how the Council will redesign and transform the way it works to deliver public services as a result of learning from the response to COVID-19.	Chris Bally
Transformation	Develop a new approach to transformation in the medium-term beyond the end of the existing programme in March 2022.	Chris Bally
Corporate Governance	Complete induction and specific training for all Councillors to ensure that they have a full understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and how these contribute to the governance of the Council.	Tim Ryder
Corporate Governance	Complete the implementation the Oracle Fusion Enterprise Resource Platform and commence work on the realisation of the benefits through improved integrated financial, procurement and HR processes.	Chris Bally
Corporate Governance	Complete a governance and 'lessons learned' review of the arrangements the County Council put in place response to Covid-19 pandemic.	Chris Bally
Finance	Undertake a review of compliance against CIPFA's Financial Management Code, designed to support good practice in financial management and to assist local authorities in demonstrating their financial sustainability.	Louise Aynsley
Finance	Work with Cabinet and the Corporate Leadership Team to develop the 2022/23 budget and a Medium-Term Financial Strategy which addresses the financial challenge as we emerge from Covid-19, including consideration of Fairer Funding and the Transformation framework.	Louise Aynsley
Counter- Fraud	Delivery targeted fraud awareness training to social work practitioners.	Christos Constantinou

ACTION PLAN

FOR 2021/22 cont...

Area	Governance matters identified	Lead Officer
Risk Management	Implement the actions from the review of the risk management policy and guidance documentation to align to good practice in the Government's Orange Book publication.	Paul Emeny
Risk Management	Introduce enhanced reporting of high-level risks, notably the reporting of a broader range of risks and direction of travel over time. This will give senior management teams and Audit Committee greater control on how risks are managed and assurance that issues are reviewed by risk owners on a regular basis.	Paul Emeny
Corporate Performance	Review and refresh Performance reports to ensure the organisation is measuring the right things in the right way and provide a mechanism to escalate significant performance issues to the corporate level.	Paul Emeny
Human Resources	Complete the New Ways of Working Review and ensure all necessary supporting and enabling actions are delivered to secure a successful implementation of any changes.	Jeanette Bray
Human Resources	Develop of a new People Strategy, to follow on from the current four-year strategy and ensure a continued, proactive approach to meeting future workforce challenges.	Jeanette Bray
Human Resources	Deliver HR actions to support the delivery of the new race equality plan.	Jeanette Bray
Information Governance	Implement additional measures to seek to minimise data breaches occurring.	Peter Knight
Information Governance	Develop and implement a programme of information-governance related training, prioritising staff who work with sensitive personal data.	Peter Knight
Information Governance	Complete the review of the Council's legacy data held at the Records Management Centre.	Peter Knight

ACTION PLAN

FOR 2021/22 cont...

Area	Governance matters identified	Lead Officer
Procurement	Ensure that any practices that were permitted temporarily during COVID-19 under a Procurement Policy Notice are minimised and moved back to the Council's standard practice.	Matt West
Procurement	Strengthen mechanism for reviewing the outcomes from tenders that include a Social Value offer.	Matt West
Procurement	Implement the Climate Change Commercial Ask with our staff, supply chain and stakeholders to reduce the carbon impact of our supply chain.	Matt West
Communications	Carry out a significant public engagement exercise to develop a long-term strategic vision for Suffolk incorporating Suffolk's plans for its recovery from Covid-19. This will draw on the views of residents from all backgrounds, public sector organisations, the business community, charitable and voluntary sectors. Post-COVID-19 recovery will be an important context to this debate.	Andrew St. Ledger
Equalities & Inclusion	Delivery of actions in the Race Equality Action Plan, with oversight from the Race Equality Gold group. A new Specialist Lead Inclusion post will review and develop the Council's approach to delivering equalities and inclusion both internally and in partnership with external organisations and communities.	Christine Geeson
Health & Safety	Strengthen arrangements for Health & Safety audits across all Directorates and address subsequent actions.	Mike Leake
Wholly Owned Companies	Complete a review of the Council's Shareholder arrangements for the Wholly Owned Companies following the Election and work with Suffolk Group Holdings to implement the findings from their independent Governance Review.	Matt West

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