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Annual Governance Statement 2020/21

Introduction

Ashfield District Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper accounting standards and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

As part of the arrangements for preparing the Annual Statement of Accounts, the Council is required by law to undertake an annual review of the effectiveness of its system of internal control and produce an Annual Governance Statement. Good practice requires that such a statement should extend beyond a narrow focus on financial controls to cover the way in which the Council determines what its local community wants and needs; decides how those requirements are to be met; and ensures that it delivers what is required without wasting public money.

What is Corporate Governance?

Corporate governance is part of the overall control framework and contributes to the Council's robust governance arrangements.

Good corporate governance ensures organisations are doing the right things in the correct manner in an open, honest, inclusive and accountable way. Good governance leads to good management, performance and outcomes. It ensures the Council delivers the visions and priorities set out in its Corporate Plan.

Ashfield District Council is committed to good corporate governance. The Council has a framework of policies and procedures in place which collectively make up its governance arrangements.

The Principles of Good Governance

A summary

The Council aims to achieve good standards of governance by:

- A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law**
- B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement**
- C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits**
- D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes**
- E. Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it**
- F. Managing risks and performance through robust control and strong public financial management**
- G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability**

How the Council Works

The Council consists of 35 elected Councillors. The way the Council operates is prescribed by its Constitution which sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Council, Cabinet, Committees, Panels and other Groups and specifies the powers and duties that are delegated to those bodies and to individual Councillors and Officers. The Constitution is subject to regular review and is updated to ensure compliance with legal and regulatory requirements and conformance to recognised good practice.

The Council has determined that a Cabinet made up of the Leader and Portfolio Holders should have the power to discharge all Executive functions. The role of the Council and its regulatory Committees (such as Planning and Licensing Committees) is set out in the Constitution. The Council has also established an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Panels with the power to review decisions made. The Audit Committee provides assurance as to the adequacy of the Council's risk management framework and control environment and scrutinises the Council's financial performance and reporting. The Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee has been established to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Officers.

During 2020/2021 the management of the Council was the responsibility of the Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service) (Interim) supported by the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). CLT comprises four Directors (Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer), Housing & Assets, Resources & Business Transformation and Place & Communities) each reporting directly to the Chief Executive. The recruitment for a new, permanent Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service) had been delayed due to the impact of COVID with the process being put on hold during the 2020/21. The Interim Chief Executive remained in place to ensure consistency and stability during the COVID response and recovery processes. The Chief Officers' Employment Committee met in March 2021 to recommence the recruitment. The interviews for a new Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service) took place on 14 July 2021 and the appointment of a new Chief Executive was formally ratified at the Council meeting on 29 July 2021. The Director of Housing & Assets also carries out the role of Deputy Chief Executive acting in the absence of the Chief Executive. The Corporate Finance Manager is the appointed Chief Financial Officer (Section 151 Officer) and is also a member of the CLT.

The Council's vision and ambition for the District are clearly identified in a set of Corporate Priorities which are presented in the Corporate Plan which supports the development of annual service plans for all individual services. A new Corporate Plan was adopted in 2019 and was revised in July 2020 to take account of the pandemic. The Corporate Plan was refreshed and approved at Cabinet on 29 June 2021. A robust project management approach is in place to ensure successful delivery of the Corporate Plan through programme and project

management. The Council has established a Performance Management Framework: clear performance targets are set for each Service and performance achieved is subject to regular monitoring using objective performance indicators. Service Performance is monitored regularly by the Chief Executive at Performance Boards. Employees undergo an annual Personal Development Review linked to a competency framework.

A Budget and Policy Framework has been established to ensure that budget and policy decisions are taken in an appropriate manner and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) – supported by robust budgeting and budgetary control arrangements - ensures that the Council's financial position is sustainable and that a balanced budget is set each year. The Council's Risk Strategy sets the way in which risks are identified, evaluated and managed. Risk Registers are maintained and reviewed by CLT, Cabinet and Audit Committee to ensure that appropriate and timely action is taken to deal with the risks that have been identified. The Corporate Risk Register was updated in July 2020 to take account of the Pandemic; the Corporate Risk Strategy, Risk Register and Risk Appetite Framework were approved at Audit Committee and Cabinet in February 2021. The Central Midlands Audit Partnership (CMAP), on behalf of the Council, carries out a programme of audits annually to provide assurance about the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes. A Fraud Risk Register is in place to identify and mitigate against potential fraudulent activities the Council may be the victim of.

The Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Ashfield District Council

CIPFA published a Statement in 2010 on the 'Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government'. It identifies the five key principles that define the core activities and behaviours of the role and the organisational arrangements to support them. The table below explains how the Council's arrangements comply with the statement.

1 The CFO in a public service organisation is a key member of the Leadership Team, helping it to develop and implement strategy and to resource and deliver	• The Roles and Responsibilities of the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) are set out in job descriptions. These were updated as part of the management restructure in May 2017. At that time a new job description was put in place for the Corporate Finance Manager and Section 151 Officer (CFM) role. • The CFM reports to the Director of Resources and Business Transformation, and is also a member of the Corporate Leadership Team. Monthly meetings also take place between the Chief Executive and CFM.
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	the organisation's strategic objectives sustainably and in the public interest.	• An up to date scheme of delegation exists; for financial year 2020/21 this was confirmed by Annual Council (April 2020). The next revision for 2021/22 financial year was submitted to the Annual Council in May 2021. • The authority's governance arrangements allow the CFM to bring influence to bear on all material business decisions, and has direct access to all CLT members, the Audit Committee and External Audit. • The CFM manages the Finance Team (which also includes Treasury Management, Creditors, Rent Accounting and Insurance functions). It is considered that such responsibilities still enable the role to have a clear focus on financial management particularly since the introduction of the Chief Accountant post in March 2018. • CLT receive regular updates on the MTFS, budget monitoring and year end outturn. The CFM ensures that their knowledge and awareness of financial issues is up to date through regular briefings. Three of the four Principal Accountants have each been allocated a Directorate in order to provide direct support and challenge when necessary. One Principal Accountant has responsibility for Capital and Treasury Management. The four Principal Accountants report directly to the Chief Accountant. • By having the above measures in place, the CFM is able to contribute to the effective leadership and corporate management of the Council. The CFM leads the development of the MTFS and annual budget process to ensure financial sustainability.
2	The CFO in a public service organisation must be actively involved in, and able to bring influence to bear on, all material business decisions to ensure immediate and longer term implications, opportunities and risks are fully considered, and	• The Council has a medium term business and financial planning process to deliver the Council's strategic objectives, including an MTFS, an annual budget process and regular and timely monitoring of budget performance. • Professional advice on decisions which have financial implications is provided by the Finance Team and is included in every report. In addition, accountants work with budget holders in advance of major decisions to ensure that the financial implications are accurate and well understood. • The CFM assesses the adequacy of reserves and a reserves policy was introduced as part of the Financial Regulations update in May 2018. The latest review informed the assurance given in the 2021/22 Annual Budget and Council Tax Setting report to Council on 4 March 2021.

	alignment with the organisation's financial strategy.	• Timely, accurate and impartial information is provided to decision makers, which helps to ensure effective stewardship of public money and that the Council achieves the objectives it has set out in its Corporate Plan. • The Council maintains a prudential financial framework which is reported on three times each year, to ensure that its commitments remain within its available resources. • An appropriate accounting system is in place although there are opportunities to develop this further. An upgrade to this system was implemented in early December 2020. Through this system regular financial monitoring reports are produced for Officers and Members.
3	The CFO in a public service organisation must lead the promotion and delivery by the whole organisation of good financial management so that public money is safeguarded at all times and used appropriately, economically, efficiently and effectively.	• The CFM is responsible for ensuring that appropriate advice is given on all financial matters, for keeping financial records, and for maintaining an effective system of financial control. • Systems and processes for financial administration, financial control and protection of the Council's resources are well designed. Such arrangements are subject to independent risk based auditing by Internal Audit. The Council's Internal Audit arrangements are provided by Central Midlands Audit Partnership. The Monitoring Officer is responsible for ensuring an effective Internal Audit function is in place. • The Annual Governance Statement includes all the Council's significant governance issues. • Annual accounts are published on a timely basis and are presented by the CFM to Cabinet, Audit Committee and senior officers. • The Council has an Audit Committee. Comprehensive Member training took place following the May 2019 District Council elections. Further training has been provided specifically in relation to the management of the Investment Property portfolio and in June 2021 some of the Audit Committee Members attended virtual Audit Committee training provided by Mazars. • The Council has received positive Value for Money conclusions since 2009/10. • Financial competencies are embedded in person specifications and staff appraisals. • The Finance Team lead initiatives to improve non-financial managers' understanding of finance. • Financial training is provided for elected Members as required. Financial Management training was rolled out to Members and relevant Officers after the May 2019 elections. In the May 2021 By Elections two new Councillors were elected and training is currently being planned both for these two new Members and will be offered as refresher training to all elected Members.

4	The CFO must lead and direct a finance function that is resourced to be fit for purpose.	• The Finance function has the resources, expertise and systems to perform its role effectively. A Finance restructure is part-way through implementation with Phase 1 being completed in 2018. Phase 2 will be implemented once the finance system's new functionality has been embedded and efficiencies realised. Ensuring the required expertise is in place will require constant review in light of the innovative projects which are being explored. • All the Finance staff within the Council report via the Chief Accountant to the CFM.
5	The CFO must be professionally qualified and suitably experienced.	• The CFM is a CIMA qualified accountant (2002) with over 19 years post-qualification Local Government experience who has previously undertaken the role of Deputy Section 151 Officer at this Council. The CFM has been S151 Officer at this Council for 3 years. • He has wide ranging senior local government finance experience, gained from employment at two other authorities, including the role of Director of Service Finance for a period of 5 years and Chief Finance Manager for a period of 6 years. • His role is well understood by Members and Officers throughout the Council.

The Role of the Monitoring Officer in Ashfield District Council

The Council is required to ensure it has in place effective arrangements for the discharge of the statutory Monitoring Officer Function.

The Constitution sets out the statutory role and functions of the Monitoring Officer and recognises that the Council must ensure the Monitoring Officer has access to sufficient resources in order to undertake the role.

The Director of Legal and Governance is appointed by Council to be the Monitoring Officer. The Director of Legal and Governance has 12 years experience of acting as the Monitoring Officer for the Council and is a qualified Solicitor with 23 years post-qualification experience in Local Government. The Monitoring Officer is a member of CLT and is directly line managed by the Chief Executive.

The Director of Legal and Governance has sufficient resources available including suitable Deputy Monitoring Officer provision. The Monitoring Officer and Deputies attend appropriate training each year.

The Monitoring Officer is responsible for ensuring an effective Internal Audit function is in place and is lead Chief Officer for both the Audit Committee and Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee.

How does the Council Review the Effectiveness of its Governance Framework?

The initial review of the effectiveness of the Council's governance framework was conducted by the Council's Director of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer) supported by the Assistant Director, Corporate Services and Transformation.

To inform the initial review process:

- The Corporate Leadership Team carried out a Corporate Assurance Assessment
- Each Director provided a Statement of Assurance
- The Council's Chief Financial Officer (S151 Officer) was consulted
- The Constitution review, performance reporting and risk management arrangements were taken into account
- The findings reported by External Audit and other external review bodies were considered
- The work of Internal Audit and other internal assurance providers were also considered.

The results of the review work were formulated into a draft Governance Statement during June and July 2021. The Corporate Leadership Team reviewed the draft Governance Statement and considered whether the improvements proposed represented an appropriate and proportionate response to the significant governance issues identified.

The draft Governance Statement, modified to reflect the views of the Corporate Leadership Team, was then considered by Members of the Council's Audit Committee.

The Director of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer) then finalised the Annual Governance Statement in readiness for the close of accounts and the Statement will be considered for formal approval by the Council's Audit Committee at its meeting in September 2021.

How do we know our arrangements are working?

Review of Effectiveness 2020/21

- The Council has assessed itself against the key criteria for good corporate governance by undertaking a Corporate Assurance Assessment. A score of 93%, or “good” was recorded. The Council will continue to work on identified areas to ensure further improvements are made. Ongoing improvements and significant issues are recorded later in the statement.
- Key changes, developments and achievements during 2020/2021 have been reviewed against our Corporate Plan and Local Code of Corporate Governance to assess compliance and a brief summary is set out in Appendix 1.
- The current Local Code of Corporate Governance was reviewed and approved by Audit Committee in March 2021 and will be reviewed later in the year.
- The Council has assessed whether the key areas identified in the 2019/2020 Annual Governance Statement have been delivered and an update is set out below.
- The CIPFA Financial Management Code requires the Council to carry out a self-assessment against the requirements of this Code. An introductory report has been presented to the Audit Committee in July 2021 and the self-assessment will be presented to the Audit Committee in September 2021 before being tabled at Cabinet in November 2021 for consideration. An initial high-level review of the requirements is not indicating any major issues for the Council.
- **As a result of the review work undertaken the Council’s governance arrangements are deemed to be good and are fit for purpose.**
- **During the COVID-19 response and initial recovery phases the Council’s governance arrangements have largely remained unaffected and unchanged and have been effective and fit for purpose. The impacts of COVID-19 are detailed further below.**

Internal Audit Opinion 2020/21

Central Midlands Audit Partnership (CMAP), who provide internal audit services to the Council, has provided its opinion for 2020/21. Based on the work undertaken during the year, CMAP is able to give an opinion that the Council has a “satisfactory system of internal control” (the highest level of assurance opinion which can be given).

Their full report was presented to the Council’s Audit Committee on 26 July 2021.

During 2017 CMAP underwent a review by a qualified external assessor to assess the partnership’s conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). CMAP currently conforms to the PSIAS.

Reflecting on Governance and the Challenges of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Response

Ashfield District Council is a statutory Category One Responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and works with multi agency partners through the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Local Resilience Forum (LRF) when dealing with Major Incidents. The Covid-19 Pandemic was declared a Major Incident on 20 March 2020 by the LRF.

The LRF’s Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) ensures the effective co-ordination of the multi-agency response and recovery to the Covid-19 outbreak. The Director of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer) has attended the SCG meetings for the Council.

As a consequence of the complexity of the Covid-19 Pandemic, an extensive LRF structure was put in place underneath the SCG to manage and monitor the crisis across the County and City. The operational structure beneath the SCG was made up of numerous groups covering health, humanitarian support, economy, finance, communications and a dedicated Local Authority group was also established; a number of these groups had sub-groups to deal with specific issues. As an early action, the SCG agreed a list of Tier 1, Tier 2 and support services which members confirmed were the minimum essential for delivery by all Local Authorities. At a local level, CLT has had weekly discussions as part of its usual meeting structure with interim information and updates being cascaded on a regular basis through ad-hoc meetings, telephone calls, e-mails, all staff messages and blogs. The Leadership Group has received regular updates and

Members have received regular briefings. Various internal COVID-19 Incident Management Teams (IMT's) were established to monitor operational delivery and impacts at different times throughout the year. Information has been provided to the public on a regular basis across social media and the Council's website.

Council employees have worked tirelessly throughout the past 18 months during the pandemic. Ashfield District Council has delivered **all essential Council services in full without interruption**, along with other priority services and the additional COVID-19 responsibilities placed upon it by government such as undertaking thousands of welfare calls and visits to vulnerable people, advising businesses on social distancing requirements, paying grant monies to businesses, assisting with COVID testing sites. The Authority has worked effectively together as One Council, re-deploying employees into critical roles outside of their normal duties to ensure continuance of service, whilst also delivering humanitarian services across the District to support our vulnerable residents.

A Corporate Plan Refresh and year end performance report was presented to Cabinet on 29 June 2021. The appendix to that report detailed the Council's response to COVID-19 and the continuation of services from February 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Recovery

As the country approached the end of the first national lockdown in June 2020, the Council had begun to plan to transition into the recovery phase of this Major Incident, and reflected on how it had responded to the crisis up to that point. The focus up to June 2020 had been on the immediate coordinated response to support the District during the lockdown period.

Cabinet approved the Council's Recovery Strategy in June 2020 and in July 2020 approved a revised Corporate Plan which reflected that Recovery Strategy. The Corporate Risk Register was also reviewed and accepted by Cabinet in July 2020 to take into account the impacts of COVID-19. Due to the longevity of the pandemic the Corporate Plan and Corporate Risk Register have again been reviewed and updated taking into account COVID-19 during June 2020 and March and July 2021.

The Council's recovery plan covers two main strands:

- **Ashfield as a Place – Community and Economic Recovery**

Supporting the community and businesses in achieving stability and a new normality following COVID-19, assisting in rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating the community's emotional, social, economic and physical wellbeing; and

- **The Council – Organisational Recovery**

Assessing the impact of COVID-19 on Council services, finances and employees and planning for its future financial resilience and how it will need to operate differently.

The Council established a COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel in July 2020 to ensure a dedicated, robust and focused approach to reviewing the Council's approach to COVID-19. The work of this Scrutiny Panel has been wide ranging and has involved both Officers and stakeholders in order to develop the best possible forward plans, including our employees, residents, businesses and the voluntary sector. At the Council Annual General Meeting on 20 May 2021, the COVID Scrutiny Panel was established for a further municipal year but is now focussed on the Recovery stage. During the next few weeks, the initial Recovery Strategy and Plan will be reviewed and refreshed.

The still ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact nationally and across the District over a longer timescale than anyone expected a year ago. Although the Council's response work will continue for some time to come, the recovery for the District has been underway for around a year in parallel to the response and due to the Council's incredible ability to deliver all essential Council services in full without interruption it is well placed to ensure recovery of the District will be successful and timely. During the Pandemic, the Council submitted an astoundingly successful Towns Fund bid which has seen the Council be awarded over £62 million to fund 17 projects across Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Sutton-in-Ashfield. This funding will significantly assist in the Recovery of Ashfield.

Governance Arrangements During COVID-19

During the COVID-19 response and initial recovery phases the Council's governance arrangements have largely remained unaffected and unchanged and have been effective and fit for purpose.

The legal requirements for good governance and decision-making did not change as a result of COVID-19. Normal delegations to Committees, Portfolio Holders and Officers remained in place:

- The Leader of the Council could exercise ALL Executive powers.
- The Leader of the Council has delegated ALL Executive Functions to the Chief Executive.

- In circumstances where an emergency threatens to take critical systems or services off-line or out of action, the Chief Executive can exercise all necessary powers to ensure the continuity of operations and core Council business.

During the initial stages of the pandemic when the pace of Government direction was rapid and ever changing, decisions were often taken urgently (utilising these delegated powers) and with immediate effect as a direct consequence of this Government direction / legislation. As such, some decisions at the outbreak of the pandemic were taken without full written reports being prepared in order to comply fully with the legal position or guidance. These decisions were taken by the Leader or the Chief Executive or by the relevant Chief Officer under the direction of the Chief Executive pursuant to their delegated powers. While Portfolio Holders were unable to visit the offices, discussions relating to decision making were made electronically / over the phone and electronic signatures / e-mail confirmation to decisions has been utilised. The signing and sealing of legal documents continued in a COVID safe working environment. A log of COVID-19 related Executive Decisions taken during March – June 2020 was reported to Cabinet in June 2020 and was endorsed by Cabinet.

COVID legislation made it possible to hold virtual Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings from 5 April 2020. The Council made full use of these interim rules and held its first virtual meeting (the AGM) on 23 April 2020. The Council's virtual meetings were streamed live on its YouTube channel and the public were able to participate in planning meetings. From June 2020 onwards, the Council ran a full Cabinet, Council and Committee meeting schedule. The normal rules relating to the publication of an agenda 5 clear days in advance of the meeting were complied with and the public was able to see or hear the meeting taking place live. The rules relating to publication of key decisions and the call in procedures for Executive decisions remained in place as did the ability to take and implement urgent decisions under the Access to Information Procedure Rules 15 and 16 and Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 13. The Council actively used these provisions to ensure its governance arrangements were maintained and as a result, there was an increase in the use of these urgency rules during the pandemic.

The decisions to put the CEO recruitment on hold during the pandemic and retain the services of the Interim CEO ensured consistent and stable leadership throughout the pandemic.

The pandemic required the Council to put in place new control measures in some situations, for example:

- COVID grant payments were paid in accordance with the published schemes and due diligence checks were undertaken before payments were made to ensure entitlement and prevent fraudulent claims
- Covid Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel

- Clear communications to the public and businesses via: Social media messages; Covid information officers; Business support directory; Environmental Health Officers and Public Health England regarding guidance to businesses

Throughout the last year of the pandemic the Council has continued to comply with the Principles of Managing Public Money. The impact of the pandemic on the Council in terms of additional costs and lost income have been included in financial monitoring reports and information to CLT, Cabinet, Audit Committee and the Covid Scrutiny Panel. The Council has completed the various weekly, monthly and quarterly Government returns, with some of this information (grant payments to businesses) being reported publicly on the Gov.UK website. In conjunction with the other Nottinghamshire District and Borough Councils, a Discretionary Grant Scheme was devised and implemented. This was published on the Council's website and applications were assessed against the transparent criteria within the Scheme. Similarly, the local scheme developed for applicants for the discretionary £500 covid test and trace payments was transparent with applications being assessed against these identified criteria.

New Risks as a Result of COVID-19

There was a substantial review of the Council's Corporate Risks in April 2020 to reflect the organisational impact of the COVID pandemic.

There was an increase in risks at year-end 2019/20, mostly associated with the pandemic. Despite the increased level of risk due to COVID-19 and the pressures placed upon the Council, the total number of Corporate Risks have reduced over the last year, returning to pre-pandemic levels, there has also been a reduction in significant rated risks.

During the last 12 months, the following risks impacted (some negatively, others positively) by COVID have been:

- Introduction of Universal Credit - At the end of the financial year, Universal Credit claiming tenants contributed to 50% of the total rent arrears cases and 68% of the rent arrears value. The total rent arrears value attributed to Universal Credit at week 52 = £274,124.93 (570 cases). At the end of the financial year, 26% of tenants were claiming Universal Credit.
- Sustainability of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan – New and emerging pressures have been placed on the HRA associated with the Housing White Paper, additional fire safety measures required on Council homes, plus new Decent Homes requirements and obligations to meet carbon reduction targets. Adjustments to the HRA are being considered to ensure

the Business Plan remains viable and an update will be provided to Cabinet later in the year once greater clarity of the financial consequences of the Housing White Paper are known.

- Having an adopted Local Plan - Covid has led to delays; therefore, the timescale has been extended. Externally commissioned studies have also taken longer than expected.
- High levels of sickness absence - 2020/21 has seen the most significant reduction in the number of days lost due to sickness absence over the last 4 years. The short-term absence statistics outturn for 2020/21 was 2.46 FTE, compared to 3.61 FTE in 2019/20 and 2020/21 long-term sickness absence outturn was 6.0 FTE compared to 6.63 FTE for the previous year. Long-term sickness outturn continues to be significantly higher in comparison to short-term absence. The reduction in absence rates compared to previous years, despite the pandemic, suggests that whilst the virus may have led to some additional absence, measures such as shielding and an increase in agile working appear to have reduced causes of absence and had a positive impact on the overall absence outturn.
- Commercial property investment - All tenants are currently paying their rents in accordance with agreed payment schedules. No further Investment Property acquisitions that are purely to generate net yield will take place from April 2021 in accordance with the revised Capital and Investment Strategies approved by Council in March 2021.
- Workforce planning, inability to recruit to critical roles – there is continuing review of critical roles, resilience and capacity against essential services aligned to Covid recovery planning, the efficiency review programme and the refresh of the Corporate Plan key actions. The position is assessed regularly by CLT and cross-referenced via monitoring reports against vacancy lists, identified hard to recruit posts and mitigating actions. HR have been successful in recently securing a Local Government Association (LGA) support initiative which has commenced and is targeting work on strengthening succession planning approaches.

Throughout 2020/21 the following new risks were added to the register, mostly in relation to the impacts of COVID:

- Potential impact on resource levels and capacity due to the impact of COVID
- Ability to maintain service delivery due to absence related to COVID
- During the pandemic, the potential increased risk of decisions being made outside “normal” governance structures due to the need to react quickly to a constantly changing situation. **This risk has now been removed from the Corporate Risk Register as decision making returned to normal early in the pandemic (early June 2020).**
- Potential loss or delays in receipt of key income sources (Business Rates, Council Tax, Housing and Investment Property Rents)

- **Ability to adhere to Data Protection regulations with increased remote working (physical and digital data). This risk has now been removed from the Corporate Risk Register as there was no evidence that remote working had led to data breaches.**
- **Ability to meet statutory obligation process timescales (e.g. gas servicing)**
- **Effective strategic leadership of a robust coronavirus recovery plan**
- **Ability to deliver Town centre funding. The Council has secured over £62 million of Towns Funding and as such the pandemic has not negatively impacted on the Council's ability to obtain the funding.**
- **Impacts of COVID on resources available to deliver the annual Spring Clean – this has since been removed as a risk as the annual spring clean was delivered successfully despite the pandemic.**
- **Risks associated with delivery of an election in May 2021 – this has since been removed as the elections were delivered successfully, despite the pandemic.**

Performance During the Pandemic

Ashfield District Council has delivered all essential Council services in full without interruption, along with other priority services and the additional COVID-19 responsibilities placed upon it by government.

Despite the pandemic during 2020/21:

- **67% of the corporate scorecard measures achieved or exceeded target, or were within 10% variance of the target; and**
- **75% of the corporate scorecard measures improved position compared to the same period in the previous year, or were within 5% of the previous year's performance level.**

COVID-19 has impacted on some performance targets most notably in respect of Council Tax Collection, Business Rates Collection and Rent Collection. This mirrors the national picture and are predicated to continue to be impacted for up to 2-3 years.

Progress Regarding Improvement Actions identified in 2019/2020

Improvement Actions 2019/2020	Progress Made During 2020/21
STAR Survey with Tenants will commence during August.	Survey took place during August-September 2020 COMPLETED
Digital Transformation Programme	ONGOING implementation in alignment to approved vision, blue-print, and road maps. Specific elements fast tracked to mitigate against adverse impacts of pandemic e.g. enable on-line transactions. Action plan implemented throughout 2020/21. Final monitoring report to Cabinet in 2021 recording that actions now completed and/or integrated into other service based action plans.
Peer Challenge Action Plan – approved at Cabinet in July 2020	The Actions are completed or integrated into other action plans or service plans. COMPLETED
Development of a system to track and evaluate the outcome and implementation of decisions – rolled over from 2019/20	Not progressed during COVID-19
Review and refinement of Corporate Complaints Strategy and Procedure	Deferred due to pandemic impact. Rescheduled for March 2022 adoption of new corporate complaints policy

Communications Strategy	COMPLETED
Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee – consider how to implement the best practice recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the LGA's Draft Model Code of Conduct – ongoing	ONGOING Reports presented to Committee in July and December 2020 and March and June 2021. A new Members' Code of Conduct incorporating elements of the LGA's Model Code was developed by the Committee and approved by Council at the AGM in May 2021.
Employee Survey (December 2019 & May 2020) and /Culture Survey (February 2020 and May 2020) - integration of key outcomes into work programmes	COMPLETED. Examples include Working Together Programme, recruitment strategy, ELT/ALT forums, Internal Communications Group.

Progress Regarding Significant Issues identified in 2019/2020

Significant Issues 2019/2020	Progress Made During 2020/2021
FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY There remains significant uncertainty about the level of Central Government funding from 2020/21 linked to the implementation of the Fair Funding Review, potential changes to retained business rates levels, the proposed business rates reset, New Homes Bonus funding and post Covid-19 financial recovery. Every Local Authority faces this uncertainty. The MTFS update approved by Council in March 2020 reflects the priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan and both may require refinement once the future financial landscape becomes clearer. A new MTFS will be produced in the Autumn and will reflect the Autumn 2020 Spending Round announcement. The Council does have robust reserves which will assist in transitioning to revised levels of central government funding whilst at the same time identifying and implementing 'Options for Change' to assist with addressing the Council's future financial challenges. The Council's General Reserve at the 31st March 2020 was £6.675m; £5.175m above the minimum required balance as set out in the Council's Constitution.	As a consequence of the Covid pandemic the planned Spending Round for 2020/21 did not take place and a one-year settlement for 2021/22 was implemented by Government with an intention for a full Spending Round to take place in Autumn 2021. The funding uncertainty in respect of the Fair Funding Review, potential changes to retained business rates levels, the proposed business rates reset, New Homes Bonus funding and post Covid-19 financial recovery therefore remain. Every Local Authority faces this uncertainty. As a consequence of the above an MTFS update was produced (rather than a new, detailed MTFS) as was agreed with both External and Internal Auditors. It is the intention that a new MTFS (rather than an update report) will be produced by January 2022. The Council has robust reserves which will assist in transitioning to revised levels of central government funding whilst at the same time identifying and implementing 'Options

for Change' to assist with addressing the Council's future financial challenges.

The Council's General Reserve at the 31st March 2021 was £7.877m; £1.164m greater than in 2019/20.

INVESTMENT IN COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES

The Council has purchased Commercial Investment Properties totalling £61.770m to date (July 2020) including the acquisition of 1 property (£3.3m) in April 2020. The Capital Strategy sets out an aspiration to invest a total of £105m in Investment Properties to generate income to sustain delivery of services to residents. Council approved (5 September 2019) that £20m future year planned investment be brought forward into 2019/20. The CIPFA Guidance has been issued and considered and the view is that the Council is compliant with this.

The outcome of the PWLB Consultation is awaited to determine whether the Council may need to reconsider its aspiration around acquiring Investment Properties to generate an income stream to sustain delivery of key services.

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic one of our investment property tenants (Shearings Holidays Ltd) has gone into liquidation (May 2020). By the end of July and following robust due diligence we had secured a new tenant for the property. All other investment properties continue to pay their rent.

The new Capital Strategy provides the opportunity to fully explore a wide range of investment options based upon the Council's risk

Following the outcome of the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) consultation a decision was taken by the Council to cease its Investment Property acquisition strategy to ensure access to the PWLB as a key source of borrowing could be maintained.

The Council agreed a financial recovery arrangement with Vine Hotels (the new Hotel tenant) in light of the adverse impact on business by the pandemic.

Tenants of all of the Council's other Investment Properties have continued to pay their rents throughout the last year.

appetite whilst also ensuring proper due diligence and long term planning to reflect current and planned treasury positions.	
DATA MATCHING AND NATIONAL FRAUD INITIATIVE The Council must continue to implement the action plan to prioritise improvements. The refreshed approach will give the Council the opportunity to develop and embed their anti-fraud culture.	Development of a corporate approach to anti-fraud (including data matching) has suffered due to the pandemic as anti-fraud activity focussed largely on the COVID-19 Business Grants and not further improvement work. Two internal audit reports were carried out to support the Council's anti-fraud activity regarding COVID-19 grants and data-matching of these payments. A further internal audit report considered the Council's Management of Fraud Risk making a number of recommendations –see Significant Issues below.
LOCAL PLAN There is now expected to be a delay to the delivery of the Local Plan. This has been caused by some slippage in commissioning during the pandemic from jointly commissioned work. The work undertaken by Ashfield has been delivered to timescales. However, given the overhaul of the planning system proposed and the step change proposed to housing numbers through consultation changes to the housing methodology, it is clear that the Plan being delivered would not meet the targets the Government appears to be indicating.	The plan is continuing to be developed and a new Local Development Scheme will be provided by September 2021. Despite delays relating to Covid and clarity from Government on housing numbers, good progress has been made on the strategic approach of the plan. The Local Plan working group has agreed the strategic direction which is now being developed for consultation. The approach is based on making the best of transport hubs and corridors to provide additional employment and housing growth land. It is expected that consultation will take place in the summer 2021.

Options for delivery will now need to be revisited as well as consultation responses to the changes developed. The numbers being generated by the new housing methodology do not appear realistic for this Authority or for commercial delivery, increasing annual projections from 500 to 800 houses per year. The introduction of changes is challenging particularly in the Covid recovery period. A new Local Development Scheme will now be developed.	
EU EXIT To continue to review and update the internal Action Plan based on national status with the transition planning leading up to EU exit in December 2020 and post Exit. To continue to adopt a 'rising tide' monitoring and reporting structure - reports to CLT, Cabinet and Council.	De-escalated from being a significant governance issue following its removal as a corporate risk. No significant issues identified to date as a direct consequence of EU Exit. Any impacts from EU Exit will continue to be monitored at service level/operational risk
COVID-19 To continue to respond to the ongoing Pandemic and implement the Council's Recovery Strategy.	ONGOING See details above.

Improvement Actions

As part of the Council's drive to continuously improve its existing governance framework to meet changing conditions, the following actions have been identified to take place during 2021/2022:

Improvement Action for 2021/2022	Lead Officer(s)	Target Date
Digital Transformation Programme	Director of Resources & Business Transformation & Assistant Director, Corporate Services and Transformation	Ongoing
Review and refinement of Corporate Complaints Strategy and Procedure	Service Manager, Customer Services	December 2021
Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee – consider how to implement the best practice recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the LGA's Draft Model Code of Conduct – ongoing	Director of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer)	Ongoing

Revised Member Development Strategy and Updated Training Programme	Service Manager, Democratic and Scrutiny Services	October 2021
Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan	Director of Housing and Assets	March 2022
Review and Refresh the People Strategy including new ways of working embedded as a result of COVID-19	Director of Resources & Business Transformation & Service	March 2022
Data Quality Strategy Refresh	Assistant Director, Corporate Services and Transformation	January 2022

Significant Governance Issues

While the effectiveness review and other developments during the year demonstrate that corporate governance arrangements and the internal control framework are fit for purpose and effective, as part of continuing efforts to improve governance arrangements the following significant governance issues have been identified for improvement.

Key Improvement Area for 2021/2022	Lead Officer	Target Date
FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY There remains significant uncertainty about the level of Central Government funding from 2021/22 linked to the implementation of the Fair Funding Review, potential changes to retained business rates levels, the proposed business rates reset, New Homes Bonus funding and post Covid-19 financial recovery. Every Local Authority faces this uncertainty. The MTFS update approved by Council in March 2021 reflects the priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan and both may require refinement once the future financial landscape becomes clearer. A new MTFS will be produced in the Autumn and will reflect the Autumn 2021 Spending Round announcement. The Council does have robust reserves which will assist in transitioning to revised levels of central government funding whilst at the same time identifying and implementing 'Options for Change' to assist with addressing the Council's future financial challenges. The Council's General Reserve at the 31st March 2021 was £7.877m; £6.527m above the minimum required balance as set out in the Council's Constitution.	Corporate Finance Manager & Section 151 Officer	Ongoing

INVESTMENT IN COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES Following the outcome of the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) consultation a decision was taken by the Council to cease its Investment Property acquisition strategy to ensure access to the PWLB as a key source of borrowing could be maintained. The Council lost one of its Investment Property Tenants (Shearings Ltd) at the start of the pandemic. The Council quickly sourced a new tenant, Vine Hotels, and put in place a financial recovery arrangement in light of the adverse impact on this business sector by the pandemic. Tenants of all of the Council's other Investment Properties have continued to pay their rents throughout the last year. However, due to the pandemic still ongoing, this remains a significant governance issue. Regular update reports are taken to the Commercial Investment Working Group, CLT and the Audit Committee.	Corporate Finance Manager & Section 151 Officer	Ongoing
ANTI-FRAUD AND DATA MATCHING AND NATIONAL FRAUD INITIATIVE The Council must continue to develop and embed its corporate approach to anti-fraud (including data matching) which has suffered due to the pandemic as anti-fraud activity focussed largely on the COVID-19 Business Grants instead of further improvement work. As part of an internal audit, during 2020/21, the Council's Management of Fraud Risk was compared to the Government's Functional Standard (GovS 013: Counter Fraud) and an action plan has been developed to implement the audit recommendations in order for the Council to better meet the functional standard. The action plan will be implemented and monitored by the Anti-Fraud Officer Working Group and reported to Audit Committee as relevant.	Director of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer)	Ongoing

It will be important to consider how the Council can create greater operational resilience and improve capacity to identify and deal with suspected fraudulent activity.

LOCAL PLAN

There is now expected to be a delay to the delivery of the Local Plan. This has been caused by some slippage in commissioning during the pandemic from jointly commissioned work. The work undertaken by Ashfield has been delivered to timescales.

However, given the overhaul of the planning system proposed and the step change proposed to housing numbers through consultation changes to the housing methodology, it became clear that the Plan being delivered would not meet the targets the Government appears to be indicating. The Government has since re-assessed and figures are now confirmed.

Options for delivery have been revisited.

A new Local Development Scheme is being developed.

Director of
Place and
Communities
and Assistant
Director,
Planning and
Regulatory
Services

To be
developed
in light of
Government
changes

COVID-19 – Recovery

To assess the impacts of COVID-19 on the District and the Council and continue to respond to the ongoing Pandemic and implement the Council's Recovery Strategy.

Chief
Executive

Ongoing

The review of the Council's governance arrangements demonstrates that these are fit for purpose but to ensure continuous improvement areas have been identified which require further work.

We propose over the coming year as set out above to further enhance the Council's governance arrangements and will monitor their implementation as part of our annual review.

Signed

Date

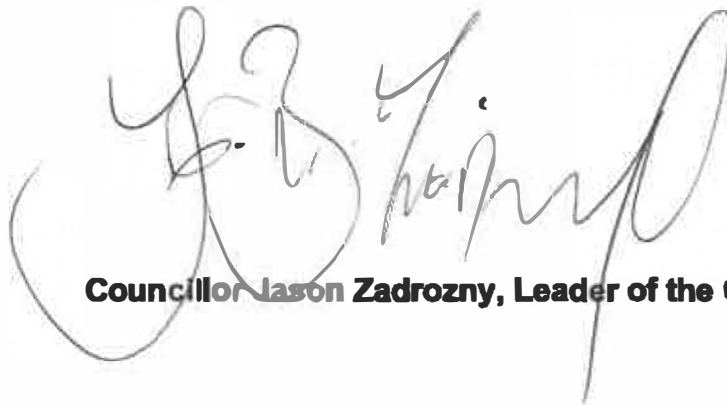
A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'C. Cooper-Smith', written in a cursive style.

29/07/21

Carol Cooper-Smith, Chief Executive

Signed

Date

A large, stylized handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. Zadrozny', written in a cursive style.

29 July 2021

Councillor Jason Zadrozny, Leader of the Council

Appendix 1 – The Governance Framework and Review of Effectiveness

Putting the Principles into Effect

	Principle	How Does the Council Achieve This
A	Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law	The Council set out its Purpose in the Corporate Plan 2019-2023 which are: • The Council exists to serve the communities and residents of Ashfield • We will provide good quality, value for money services • We will act strategically and plan for the future, working with others to bring about sustainable improvements in people's lives The Council's values, as set out in the new Corporate Plan are: • People Focussed • Honest • Proud • Ambitious The Council has identified the following priorities: • Health and Happiness • Homes and Housing • Economic Growth and Place • Cleaner and Greener • Safer and Stronger

- **Innovate and Improve**

The Key Projects, Programmes and Initiatives set out in the Corporate Plan reflect these values and priorities and the Council's Budget and Performance frameworks monitor how the Council performs against them. The Corporate Plan has been reviewed to take into account the impacts of COVID-19 and the Council's Recovery Strategy.

Councillors and Officers are both guided by codes of conduct which have been agreed by Council. The Officer Code was updated in 2017 and has been well communicated and understood throughout the organisation.

The Members' Code of Conduct was reviewed during 2020/21 by the Standards and Personnel Committee. The revised Code was adopted at the Council AGM in May 2021. The new Code incorporates elements of the Local Government Association's Model Code. The Council's Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee takes an active lead role in upholding standards and investigating any complaints made against Members. A number of complaints have been received during the year. The Committee continues to consider the Committee on Standards in Public Life report with a view to implement the best practice recommendations; this work is ongoing and forms part of the Committee's Work Plan for 2021/22.

Members and Officers are required to complete Register of Interests forms and to disclose gifts and hospitality. Members and Officers are reminded about this requirement at least annually.

The Chief Executive, the Corporate Leadership Team, and senior officers continually lead by example and promote the Council's priorities and values. The Chief Executive personally addresses colleagues on key matters such as budgets and key organisational change issues. The Chief Executive speaks to senior and middle managers as part of the Extended Leadership Team / Aspiring Leadership Team, allowing two-way dialogue on all key issues.

The Employee Survey was carried out in late 2019 and supplemented by a Covid Impact Employee Survey in May 2020. Both surveys had extremely positive outcomes with further increases in employee satisfaction across a range of measures including 'employer of choice', 'pride', leadership, development opportunities, quality of management, support with employee health and wellbeing, communications and engagement, flexible working, support with remote working. Outcomes from the Employee Survey, Culture Survey and Workforce Report have been integrated into Recruitment and Retention Strategies and key work programmes such as DST, agile working, HR and physical and mental health and wellbeing support.

		The Constitution is regularly updated and a review is carried out annually. A suite of Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policies and Procedures are in place which were reviewed in February 2020 by the Audit Committee. A "Governance" hub is available on the intranet and the Council's website which contains links to these policies and a wider range of governance documents, such as the Constitution. The Anti-Fraud and Corruption Officer Working Group with clear terms of reference meets quarterly to oversee the Council's approach to fraud and corruption and reports to CLT and Audit Committee. The Council's Whistleblowing Policy is reviewed annually and the Audit Committee and the Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee receive reports regarding the way complaints received under the policy have been dealt with. The Council has adopted a Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Transparency Statement and Policy Statement. At its meeting in November 2019, the Council agreed to adopt the Co-operative Party's Charter against Modern Slavery ensuring that the Council's procurement practices do not support slavery. A number of Council services are provided externally and these are reviewed with strong partner engagement and contract management. Each of the statutory officers is able to operate with the appropriate independence; the organisational culture respects and supports their integrity and provides the staffing arrangements to support their work. A Member/Officer Protocol informs the relationship between Officers and Members.
B	Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement	The Council operates in an open and transparent way, and takes the vast majority of its key decisions in public meetings at Council, Cabinet and Committees. The Constitution encourages debate around key decisions and Council meetings include the scope for questions from Councillors and members of the public. Arrangements were in place for urgent decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic and an update report, including decisions taken, was reported to Cabinet in June 2020 for endorsement. Verbal updates regarding COVID-19 have been provided by the Leader on a number of occasions to Council. The COVID Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel met a number of times during 2020/21 and actively invited stakeholders to attend meetings to hear about the impacts of the pandemic on businesses and communities. The Council embraced virtual meetings during the pandemic holding its first virtual meeting (the AGM) on 23 April 2020, after which all meetings were held virtually until May 2021 when meetings were legally required to return to being held in person.

The Council consults widely with internal and external stakeholders on key policy changes in accordance with its agreed policies. The Cabinet approved the Community Engagement Strategy in July 2020. The Council continues to increase the use it makes of new media channels such as Facebook and Twitter and its YouTube channel.

The Council has a well-developed approach to working with partners to achieve Corporate Plan outcomes. Co-location with the DWP and police partners has provided a positive impact leading to better ways of dealing with complex cases. Officers and the police hold bi-weekly Partnership Risk Management Panels. Operation Safekeeping was a joint initiative with police and partners for Halloween and Bonfire Night.

A wide variety of communication methods are used to seek the views of different stakeholders. The Council's magazine "Ashfield Matters" is produced four times a year, and regular Citizens' Panel meetings (before the pandemic restricted the holding of these meetings) which allows residents to discuss key policy issues with senior Council managers. The Council continues to develop its use of social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter and YouTube, to promote Council campaigns, provide information to residents and businesses, deal with customer enquiries and engage with local communities; this has been used very effectively during the pandemic. The Council's new, accessible Website was launched in Autumn 2020.

Senior Managers continue to meet with the Trade Unions on a regular basis to actively engage and consult on employee related issues.

The Place Enhancement Programme continues to develop ways to improve the public perception of the District and promote the area. As part of this Programme, the Ashfield Place Board, which is independently chaired by a local business leader, meets regularly. The Board was responsible for creating and launching the "Discover Ashfield" brand.

Considerable engagement and consultation has taken place with partners and stakeholders in relation to the development of the proposed schemes for the Future High Streets Fund and the Towns Fund.

Engagement with the Youth Council will restart once COVID restrictions are lifted.

Effective communications were vital during the pandemic and the Council ensured information was available to the public and businesses. The Council employed COVID information officers who proved an invaluable resource

		for communicating with the public and businesses; over 3,200 visits were made to business and licensed premises to provide COVID information. Regeneration officers created a Business Support Directory. The Environmental Health Team worked with Public Health England to provide advice to businesses in relation to COVID legislation, guidance and restrictions.
C	Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits	The Corporate Plan sets out clearly the outcomes to which the Council is committed. It continually checks the deliverability of these outcomes against the available resources and for this purpose both the Corporate Plan and the Medium Term Financial Plan are reviewed. The Council's performance indicators and its Corporate Scorecard and Place Scorecard are considered regularly by senior management, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. Comprehensive and regular dialogue, on priorities, performance and financial planning take place between the Cabinet and the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), with the result that the Council is able to shape its ambitions around the resources available to it, and its partners. Long-term impacts of decisions are forecast using the Council's Weighted Benefit Model for individual projects, and the Medium Term Financial Strategy for the whole of the Council's services; the MTFs was updated and approved by Council in March 2021. The Treasury Management Strategy and Related Policy Statements were approved at Audit Committee and Cabinet in February 2021. The Council's updated Capital Strategy, Commercial Property and Investment Strategy and Commercial Property Indicators were approved at Audit Committee and Cabinet in February 2021 before approval at Council in March 2021. The Council's Corporate and Fraud Risks are identified and recorded in registers and regularly monitored through CLT, Cabinet and Audit Committee. The Council's Corporate Risk Register was updated in light of COVID-19 and approved at Cabinet in July 2020. The Corporate Risk Strategy, Risk Register and Risk Appetite Framework were approved at Audit Committee and Cabinet in February 2021. In accordance with the Council's Social Value Policy, by April 2021 the social and local economic value from procurement activity was over £1 million including local employment and apprenticeships. During 2020/21 the Council also adopted the Ashfield Health and Wellbeing Partnership Strategy 2021-25 and the Environmental Charter.

D	Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes	The Council's interventions which aim to achieve its Corporate Plan objectives are planned through a number of Programme Boards or are monitored as a regular agenda item at directorate management team meetings. The current programme boards are:- • Regeneration • Commercial Investment Working Group • Digital and Service Transformation • Discover Ashfield • Health and Well Being • Efficiency (assets, procurement and restructures) Where relevant, Project Boards sit underneath these boards, working specifically on key projects. The programme boards consider the merits of a range of projects for achieving the aims of the Corporate Plan. They employ the Council's Weighted Benefit Model to assess the impact against key priorities, and the affordability of the intervention. Activity within the boards is now being prioritised in order to sharpen its focus. The Corporate Leadership Team considers the priority order for new projects, and their affordability in the context of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
E	Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it	The Leader and Chief Executive have clearly defined roles. Regular meetings between senior managers and portfolio holders allow for timely discussion of emerging policies and issues, and overviews of strategic developments such as the budget and MTFS. Comprehensive training programmes are in place for officers and Members; this Learning and Development programme is shared between Ashfield and Mansfield as part of the Human Resources Shared Service. Working between the two organisations gives valuable insights into different approaches to organisational management and development. The Members' Development Strategy was approved in 2017 and is currently being revised. Mandatory training has been identified and incorporated into the Code of Conduct. A comprehensive Member Induction programme was rolled out after the May 2019 District Elections to ensure new and returning Members were well equipped for

		their roles as Councillors during the year. A new training programme is being developed for Members in light of COVID-19 and a move to virtual training methods. The Council has a People Strategy in place and is actively working to develop officers as part of the Leadership Competency Framework (integrated into PDRs and recruitment). The digital and service transformation (DST) programme has been fast tracked throughout Covid supported by additional investment, specialist external and internal capacity and skills, internal secondments, and a revised blueprint and road maps targeting resources to especially support essential services and remote/virtual working and need for expedited channel shift options for residents. A bi-weekly DST officers/members group provides steer, review and monitoring of progress, benefits realisation and programme of prioritisation of developments. To ensure high quality of customer/user experience a new role of Service Manager, Customer Services has been appointed to intrinsically linked to maximising use of technology. To assist with user experience and channel shift a new accessible website was launched in autumn 2020.
F	Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management	The Council's Corporate Risk Register is regularly updated and considered by Cabinet and the Audit Committee. The Anti-Fraud and Corruption Working Group monitors the Fraud Risk Register quarterly and reports to the Audit Committee annually. Risk Management informs service planning and project planning and is a specific consideration when new capital projects are being developed. The Corporate Risk Register is aligned to the Corporate Plan and its priorities and was updated to take account of COVID-19. The Council has well-developed Emergency Planning processes and procedures and contributes to regional training events and Local Resilience Forum Sub-Groups. Each service has a Business Continuity Plan and a Critical Function Plan (if appropriate). The Council's Business Continuity and Emergency Planning procedures have been successfully implemented and improved during the pandemic and the Council has taken an active role in the LRFs Response and Recovery Structures as well as implementing its own internal structures. The Council has a mature performance management system and reporting, developed over a number of years and reflecting all of the Council's key performance areas. This is summarised in a Corporate Scorecard which is scrutinised quarterly. Data accuracy is regularly audited.

		The Council has a good track record of setting robust budgets and spending within the approved budget. The Council's finances have been guided by a well-developed and communicated MTFS for several years. This MTFS is informed by regional and national expertise and the latest iteration is informed by resource modelling from Local Government Futures (LG Futures). By setting and implementing annual savings plans, the Council has been able to consistently reduce its net budget. The Council has achieved unqualified accounts and a positive Value For Money assessment throughout this period. The Commercial Investment Plan and Capital Strategy which includes due diligence and risk mitigation processes was updated and approved at Cabinet and Council in February and March 2021 respectively. Internal Control is achieved by a wide range of processes working successfully, and CMAP's assessment of internal control can be found earlier in this document. The Council's Data Management arrangements are updated regularly in line with Government guidelines and best practice and these are subject to regular detailed audits. Implementation of GDPR was successfully managed through the Project Management Framework and continued to be developed in line with new guidance and advice from the Information Commissioner. A reasonable level of assurance was given following a recent Information Governance audit review.
G	Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability	The Council's decision making is transparent; the Forward Plan of Key Decisions is accessible and is reviewed on a weekly basis by CLT. Decisions are readily available through the Council's website on the user-friendly "modern.gov" system. A recent audit report looking at delegated decision making gave assurance that the Council's processes and procedures are sound. The budget and performance are subject to reports at least quarterly. The Council's Pay Policy Statement and Gender Pay Gap have been published. The Annual Governance Statement and Corporate Assurance Checklist are updated annually. Audit recommendations are owned by management and are largely acted upon in a timely manner. There are a number of processes in place for monitoring recommendations including through CMAP reminders, reports through CLT and Performance Boards; some recommendations are also monitored via the Council's performance management system (Pentana).

