



**ANNUAL GOVERNANCE
STATEMENT 2021/22**





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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 Council has adopted a Local Code of Corporate Governance which sets out the Council's arrangements and is based on the guidance "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government" published by CIPFA (the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) and SOLACE (the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives) in 2016. The CIPFA/SOLACE guidance identifies seven core principles and various sub principles. The seven core principles are detailed on page 4 and are also used as the framework for assessing the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements.

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

- Operates in a lawful, open, inclusive and honest manner
- Makes sure that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used efficiently, effectively and economically
- Has effective arrangements for the management of risks
- Secures continuous improvements in the way that it operates.

The governance framework comprises the culture, values, systems and processes by which the Council is directed and controlled. The framework brings together an underlying set of legislative requirements, good practice principles and management processes.

A key part of the governance framework is the system of internal control: this is designed to manage the risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives to a level which the Council has determined as acceptable. The effectiveness of internal control is subject to regular review by both external and internal audit and the Annual Report of Internal Audit for 2021/22 provides an opinion on the effectiveness of the internal control system over the year ending 31st March 2022.



THE PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

The Council aims to achieve good standards of governance by:

- Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law
- Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
- Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits
- Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
- Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
- Managing risks and performance through robust control and strong public financial management
- 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 Executive Lead Members 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 2021/2022 the management of the Council was the responsibility of the Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service) 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. An interim Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service) was in post between September 2019 and July 2021. 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 2020/21. The Interim Chief Executive remained in place to ensure consistency and stability during the COVID response and recovery processes. The appointment of a new permanent Chief Executive was formally ratified at the Council meeting on 29 July 2021. The permanent Chief Executive took up post on 1 August 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. Interim arrangements for the vacant post of Director of Place and Communities have been in place since August 2021. The new permanent Director of Place and Communities commenced his role on 4 July 2022.

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 and also on 21 June 2022. 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 receive 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 out 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 March 2022 and a further update was reported to Cabinet in June 2022. 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 and has been extensively reviewed and updated during 2021/22 following the COVID pandemic.



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.

Key Principle	Council's Arrangements
<p>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 organisation's strategic objectives sustainably and in the public interest.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 and remains current. • 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. • An up to date scheme of delegation exists; for financial year 2021/22 this was confirmed by Annual Council in May 2021 and for 2022/23 at the Annual Council in May 2022. • 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.



Key Principle	Council's Arrangements
<p>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 alignment with the organisation's financial strategy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 2022/23 Annual Budget and Council Tax Setting report to Council on 3 March 2022. • 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, and through this system regular financial monitoring reports are produced for Officers and Members. The Council will be testing the market for its future core financial system in July 2022.



Key Principle	Council's Arrangements
<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. Treasury Management training was provided by Link Asset (Treasury Management Advisors) in January 2022 and in June 2021 some of the Audit Committee Members attended virtual Audit Committee training provided by Mazars, the Council's External Auditors. • The Council has received positive Value for Money conclusions/reports 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. Key financial updates have been provided to Members linked to the setting of the 2022/23 Budget. <p>A Financial Health Check was carried out by the Local Government Associations (LGA) in 2021/22 which concluded that the Council "<i>is well managed financially.</i>"</p>



Key Principle	Council's Arrangements
<p>The CFO must lead and direct a finance function that is resourced to be fit for purpose.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Finance function has the resources, expertise and systems to perform its role effectively. Once a decision has been taken about the future Core Finance system to be used by the Council from 2023/24 a review of staffing requirements will also take place. Ensuring the required expertise is in place will also 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.
<p>The CFO must be professionally qualified and suitably experienced.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CFM is a CIMA qualified accountant (2002) with over 20 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 4 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 13 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 Deputy 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 May and June 2022. 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 2022.



HOW DO WE KNOW OUR ARRANGEMENTS ARE WORKING?

Review of Effectiveness 2021/22

- 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 this statement.
- Key changes, developments and achievements during 2021/2022 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 2022 and will be further reviewed later in the year.
- The Council has assessed whether the key areas identified in the 2021/2022 Annual Governance Statement have been delivered and an update is set out on pages 17–22.
- The CIPFA Financial Management Code requires the Council to carry out a self-assessment against the requirements of this Code. An introductory report was presented to the Audit Committee in July 2021 and the self-assessment was presented to the Audit Committee in October 2021. The self-assessment demonstrated that the Council has processes in place to comply with each of the 6 Principles (Organisational Leadership, Accountability, Transparency, Standards, Assurance, Sustainability). An action plan was put in place to strengthen the compliance position further. The self-assessment and action plan will be reviewed and reported to Audit Committee on 7 November 2022.
- 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 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 on pages 12–16.

INTERNAL AUDIT OPINION 2021/22

Central Midlands Audit Partnership (CMAP), who provide internal audit services to the Council, has provided its opinion for 2021/22. Based on the work undertaken during the year, CMAP is able to give an opinion that the Council has a “satisfactory system Of governance, risk and internal control” (the highest level of assurance opinion which can be given).

Their full report will be presented to the Council’s Audit Committee on 25 July 2022.

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. An external assessment of conformance will be carried out during 2022/23.



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) ensured 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 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 (the Leader and Deputy Leaders of the Council) 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 2 years during the pandemic. Ashfield District Council has delivered all essential Council services in full without interruption during that 2 year period, 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-19 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 during 2021/22.



Recovery

As the country approached the end of the first national lockdown in June 2020, the Council produced initial plans to transition into the recovery phase of this Major Incident, and reflected on how it had responded to the crisis up to that point.

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, March, July and December 2021 and finally March 2022.

The Council's recovery covers two main strands and has been incorporated into the Council's Service Plans, Corporate Plan and Five Year Strategic Direction:

- **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. At the Council Annual General Meeting on 20 May 2021, the COVID Scrutiny Panel was established for a further municipal year focussing on the Recovery stage.

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. A final COVID Recovery Scrutiny Panel report was submitted to Cabinet in June 2022.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact nationally and across the District over a longer timescale than anyone expected. The Council's recovery plans for the District ran in parallel to the response during the past two years. Due to the Council's incredible ability to deliver all essential Council services in full without interruption was well placed to ensure recovery of the District has been successful to date and timely.

The Local Resilience Forum infrastructure has been stood down since March 2022. The COVID panel met for the last time on 21 April 2022 and presented its final report to Cabinet in June 2022.

During the Pandemic, the Council submitted an astoundingly successful Towns Fund bid which has seen the Council be awarded over £62 million to fund projects across Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Sutton-in-Ashfield. This funding will significantly assist in the regeneration and recovery of the District. Projects cover the themes of Business and Education, Health and Wellbeing, Boost Visitor Economy and Make Ashfield Greener. Sutton-in-Ashfield had already been awarded £6.27 million from the Future High Streets Fund.

During April 2022, the Council was allocated £3.1 million of UK Shared Prosperity Funding for the period 2022-25 and is currently working on its Investment Plan for submission to Government. The Council is also preparing a bid for Levelling Up funding for Hucknall which, if successful, will ensure significant funding to assist with Recovery and make a real difference across the whole of the District to benefit generations to come.



Governance Arrangements During COVID-19

During the COVID-19 response and 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. 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-19 safe working environment.

COVID-19 legislation made it possible to hold virtual Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings from April 2020 until May 2021.

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. From May 2021, the Council reverted to face to face meetings in accordance with legislation and COVID-19 safe guidance.

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

- COVID-19 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 early 2022 the Council devised and implemented a new Additional Restrictions Grant scheme (Discretionary Grant Scheme) for the final round of Additional Restrictions Grant funding and 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 continued throughout 2021/22 and was transparent, with applications being assessed against the identified criteria.

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-19 pandemic and these risks were kept under review during 2021/22.

Throughout 2021/22 the following COVID-19 related risks were monitored:

- Potential impact on resource levels and capacity due to the impact of COVID-19 – this risk has now become a Corporate Risk and will be monitored as part of the workforce planning and retention risk.

- Ability to maintain service delivery due to absence related to COVID-19 – The Council was able to maintain service delivery throughout the past 2 years and staff absence due to COVID-19 is not part of the Corporate Risk relating to staff absence levels.
- Effective strategic leadership of a robust coronavirus recovery plan – the Council took part in a Local Government Association Recovery and Renewal Panel during March 2022 (this is detailed further below). The significant strength of the Council's leadership during COVID was acknowledged. The Council's recovery plans are integrated into existing mechanisms and work programmes.

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 2021/22:

- The organisation has also delivered additional services, above and beyond standard service levels, continuing to support residents and businesses in Ashfield.
- 85% of performance measures achieved or exceeded target, or were within 10% variance of target.
- 65% of measures indicated an improved position compared to the same period in the previous year, or were within 5% of the previous year's performance levels.

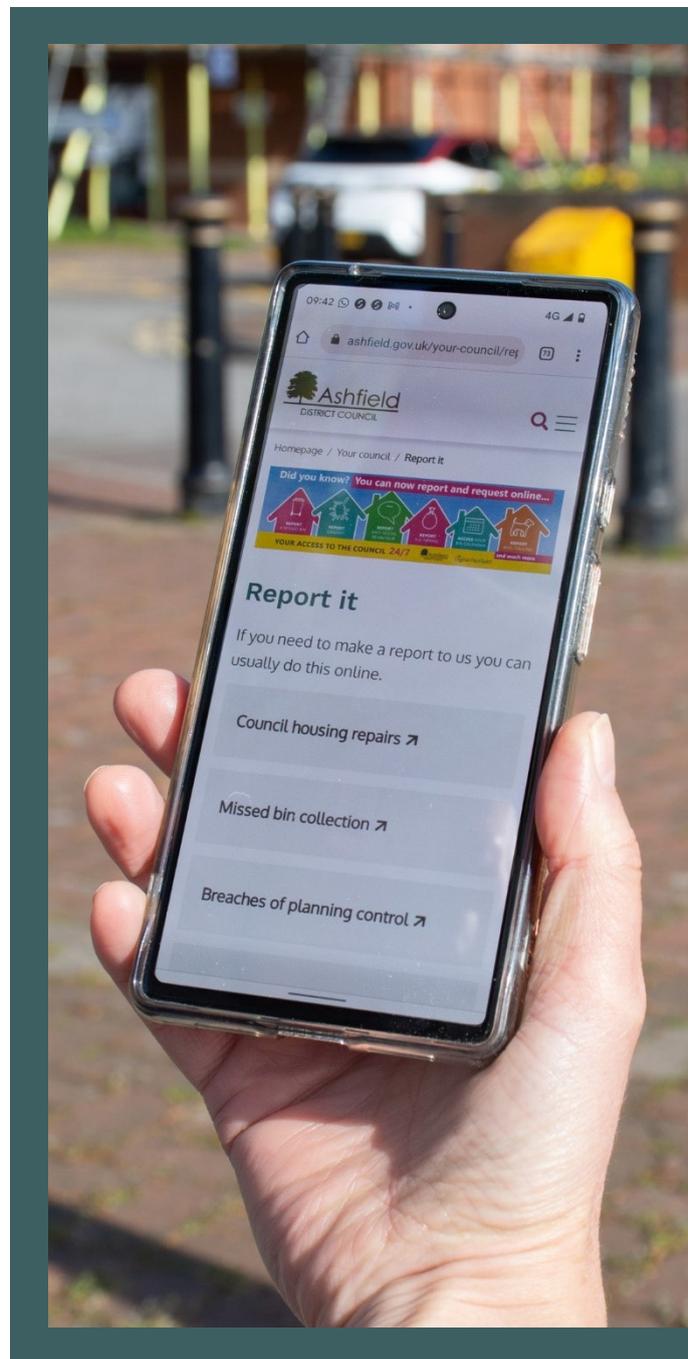


LGA Recovery and Renewal Panel

On 23 March 2022, Ashfield District Council (ADC) hosted an LGA Recovery and Renewal Panel. The Panel focused on the Council's current approach and potential future direction of travel as it seeks to best support its residents and businesses post the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The LGA Panel findings and Key Reflections report was presented to Cabinet on 21 June 2022. In summary, the report:

- Acknowledges and recognises the significant strength of leadership demonstrated by the Council throughout the Pandemic including internally and externally via partnerships and as a Leader of Place.
- Applauds the Council for accelerating its pace of change and delivery of its priorities and aspirations through the Pandemic including fast tracking its Digital and Services Transformation Programme, the Leisure Transformation Programme and successes in obtaining external funding via the Towns Fund and Future High Streets Fund.
- Makes a number of Key Reflections and actions which have been integrated into existing strategic and operational plans and existing work programmes. Progress against these will be monitored by CLT and Cabinet. The Council has made a conscious effort to integrate its COVID-19 response and recovery tasks into existing mechanisms such as ADC's Corporate Plan and Risk Management arrangements, whilst linking this into its delivery of its Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). There has been a keen and deliberate focus on integrating the response to COVID-19 into a 'Business as Usual' approach as far as is possible.



PROGRESS REGARDING IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS IDENTIFIED IN 2021/2022

Improvement Actions 2021/22	Progress Made During 2021/22
<p>Digital Transformation Programme</p>	<p>ONGOING</p> <p>Circa £2m cashable savings/opportunity cost savings delivered to date.</p> <p>Within 21/22 following key implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Portal launch (Ashfield 24/7) • Expansion of online forms and channel shift e.g. revenues/waste and environment enabling enhanced customer self-service and service requests direct to front line operatives. 20% reduction in waste and environment calls • Expansion of online e-payments to 160 different types of service transactions. Reduced volume and costs of pay point and post office transactions • Embedding of infrastructure and devices for hybrid working and enabling office rationalisation at Brook Street & Watnall Road • IT infrastructure upgrades enabling quicker log ins, transactional operations • Digitalisation of case files enabling online retrieval and reduction in physical storage e.g. housing • Website accessibility standards achieved • Website – increase in finding information at first contact. 53% reduction in use of “contact us” pages. • Telephony enhancements – introduced queue buster functionality • Digital enhancements integrated into service reviews –enabling increased efficiencies, productivity and streamlined structures. • Continued move to cloud-based solutions supporting 24/7 remote access and enhanced business continuity.
<p>Review and refinement of Corporate Complaints Strategy and Procedure</p>	<p>COMPLETED</p>



Improvement Actions 2021/22	Progress Made During 2021/22
Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee – consider how to implement the best practice recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) and the LGA’s Draft Model Code of Conduct – ongoing	<p>COMPLETED</p> <p>New Members’ Code of Conduct approved at the AGM in May 2021.</p> <p>The Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee will continue to monitor the progress of the CSPL’s recommendations as part of its ongoing work.</p>
Revised Member Development Strategy and Updated Training Programme	<p>COMPLETED</p>
Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan	<p>COMPLETED</p>
Review and Refresh the People Strategy including new ways of working embedded as a result of COVID-19	<p>ONGOING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further embedded hybrid working cross-Council • Continued effective management of pandemic impacts including monitoring of employee absence, updated HR advice/ FAQs, temporary amending of HR policies. • Enhanced communications to employees on impacts and Health and Wellbeing support • External fit for purpose sense check of pay and grading structure undertaken to assess against Living Wage pressures and equality impacts • Commenced changes to narrative within adverts to accentuate flexible working, wellbeing support recognising change in employee motivations • Streamlined Job Evaluation process recognising spike in number of posts being advertised and capacity drain on managers, HR and unions
Data Quality Strategy Refresh	<p>COMPLETED</p> <p>Revised strategy approved at CLT on 16 May 2022.</p>



PROGRESS REGARDING SIGNIFICANT ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN 2021/2022

Significant Issues 2021/2022	Progress Made During 2021/22
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>A new MTFS will be produced in the Autumn and will reflect the Autumn 2021 Spending Round announcement.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>As a consequence of the Covid pandemic the planned Spending Round for 2021/22 did not take place and a one-year settlement for 2022/23 was implemented by Government with an intention for a full Spending Round to take place in Autumn 2022.</p> <p>The funding uncertainty in respect of the Fair Funding Review, potential changes to the business rates system and New Homes Bonus funding remain. As does the uncertainty about the future of the residual Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and Lower Tier Services Grant funding. Every Local Authority faces this uncertainty.</p> <p>A detailed Medium Term Financial Strategy was produced and approved by Council in March 2022, however, an update to this will be required once greater clarity about the future level of Central Government funding becomes clearer.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The Council's General Reserve at the 31 March 2022 was £TBCm; £TBCm greater than in 2020/21</p>



Significant Issues 2021/2022	Progress Made During 2021/22
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>The Council no longer has a Strategy to acquire further Investment Properties outside of the District. The last Investment Property acquisition was April 2020. The Council has a financial recovery arrangement with Vine Hotels in light of the adverse impact on business by the pandemic. This is due for review in December 2022 with an expectation that full annual rent will become payable from April 2023.</p> <p>Tenants of all of the Council's other Investment Properties have continued to pay their rents throughout the last year.</p>



Significant Issues 2021/2022	Progress Made During 2021/22
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Progress in relation to this work stream continued to suffer due to the increased burdens of COVID-19.</p> <p>A number of fraud related policies were reviewed during the year and approved at Audit Committee in March 2022. The Fraud Risk Register has been completely reviewed and refreshed. The outstanding actions will carry forward in to 2022/23.</p>



Significant Issues 2021/2022	Progress Made During 2021/22
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Options for delivery have been revisited.</p> <p>A new Local Development Scheme is being developed.</p>	<p>Although the work undertaken by Ashfield has been delivered to timescales, the Council has, following consultation on the draft local plan during 2021/22, sought further clarification from the Government as to emerging policy and guidance. Given the intended overhaul of the planning system identified in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and the continuing lack of clarity in relation to the green belt and approach to housing numbers, it is clear that some further understanding of policy intention is required.</p> <p>A new Local Plan Timetable will be developed once further clarity is received.</p>
<p>COVID-19 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.</p>	<p>Details relating to the Council's response and recovery in relation to the Pandemic are set out earlier in this Statement.</p> <p>The LGA's Response and Recovery Panel report was very positive in relation to how the Council dealt with the challenges brought about by the pandemic. The report was presented and endorsed by Cabinet in June 2022. The Key Reflections will be integrated into existing strategic and operational strategies and work programmes as outlined in the LGA Recovery and Renewal Panel Key Reflections: Integration Plan. Progress will be monitored by Cabinet.</p>



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 2022/2023:

Improvement Action for 2022/2023	Lead Officer(s)	Target Date
<p>Digital Transformation Programme</p>	<p>Director of Resources & Business Transformation & Assistant Director, Corporate Services and Transformation</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Review and Refresh the People Strategy including new ways of working embedded as a result of COVID-19, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> External fundamental review of Council's approach to recruitment and retention to increase employer of choice offer and increase pool of potential candidates e.g. seek to encourage increased number of applications from disability/ neurodiversity and promote/embed flexible working. 2022 employee survey with focus on COVID-19 impacts, different ways of working and priority reasons for staying with the Council 	<p>Director of Resources & Business Transformation</p>	<p>March 2023</p>
<p>Review and refresh the Council's statements on Equalities Framework and Objectives</p>	<p>Director of Resources & Business Transformation & Service Manager Customer Services</p>	<p>2022/23</p>
<p>Social Housing White Paper As part of the Social Housing White Paper proposals, reports on such matters as risk and health and safety will go to Housing DMT monthly, CLT quarterly and Cabinet bi-annually, in order to provide clear oversight of risks and safety within the Social Housing function.</p>	<p>Director of Housing and Assets</p>	<p>2022/23</p>
<p>Customer / Resident surveys A task and finish group has been established to review requirements across the organisation for both transactional and perception-based surveying and satisfaction measurement. We will also consider transactional satisfaction measurement from a corporately, customer driven perspective, looking at appropriate technology to assist us with this.</p>	<p>Director of Resources & Business Transformation & Assistant Director, Corporate Services and Transformation</p>	<p>2022/23</p>



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 2022/2023	Lead Officer(s)	Target Date
<p>Financial Sustainability There remains significant uncertainty about the level of Central Government funding from 2022/23 linked to the implementation of the Fair Funding Review, potential changes to the Business Rates, and New Homes Bonus funding. Every Local Authority faces this uncertainty.</p> <p>The MTFS approved by Council in March 2022 reflects the priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan and both may require refinement once the future financial landscape becomes clearer.</p> <p>An MTFS update will be produced in the Autumn and will reflect the Autumn 2022 Spending Round announcement.</p> <p>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 2022 was £TBCm; £TBCm above the minimum required balance as set out in the Council's Constitution.</p>	<p>Corporate Finance Manager & Section 151 Officer</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>



Key Improvement Area for 2022/2023	Lead Officer(s)	Target Date
<p>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).</p> <p>The Anti-Fraud Officer Working Group will continue to deliver the action plan which was developed to better meet the Government's functional standard. The Council will consider how it can create greater operational resilience and improve capacity to identify and deal with suspected fraudulent activity.</p>	<p>Director of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer)</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Local Plan Although the work undertaken by Ashfield has been delivered to timescales, the Council has, following consultation on the draft local plan during 2021/22, sought further clarification from the Government as to emerging policy and guidance. Given the intended overhaul of the planning system identified in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and the continuing lack of clarity in relation to the green belt and approach to housing numbers, it is clear that some further understanding of policy intention is required.</p> <p>A new Local Plan Timetable will be developed once further clarity is received.</p>	<p>Director of Place and Communities and Assistant Director, Planning and Regulatory Services</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Planning Appeals Following Internal Audit work during the year a risk was identified relating to the planning appeal overturn level which will continue to be monitored during 2022/23. The appeal overturn rate was 8.16% in May 2022. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities requirements specifies that at 10% a Council's Planning process may be placed in special measures. A process has been agreed to provide quarterly updates to the Leadership Team when the percentage is over 8%. Member training is being provided as an ongoing process.</p>	<p>Director of Place and Communities and Assistant Director, Planning and Regulatory Services</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>



Key Improvement Area for 2022/2023	Lead Officer(s)	Target Date
<p>Towns Fund The £3.6 billion Towns Fund is part of the Government’s plan for levelling up the UK economy. Towns across England are working with the Government to address growth constraints and to ensure there is a course of recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The overarching aims of the Towns Fund are to drive the sustainable economic regeneration of towns to deliver long term economic and productivity growth.</p> <p>To access the funding, towns were invited to develop and submit a Town Investment Plan detailing how and where they would spend Towns Fund money, and the impacts that this would have on the local economy, for local people and local businesses. Kirkby in Ashfield and Sutton in Ashfield were both invited to be part of the Town Deal. In June 2021, the Government announced that £62.6 million has been awarded to the two towns, as part of the Government’s Towns Fund.</p> <p>The next step in the process was to develop robust business cases for the suite of projects making up the Kirkby in Ashfield and Sutton in Ashfield Town Investment Plan followed by delivery of projects over the next 5 years.</p> <p>Governance processes are in place as part of the Business Case Development stage which will then transition into the delivery stage over the length of the programme.</p>	<p>Director of Place and Communities and Service Manager, Place and Wellbeing</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

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.



Theresa Hodgkinson,
Chief Executive



Councillor Jason Zadrozny,
Leader of the Council

APPENDIX 1 – THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

PUTTING THE PRINCIPLES INTO EFFECT

PRINCIPLE A – BEHAVING WITH INTEGRITY, DEMONSTRATING STRONG COMMITMENT TO ETHICAL VALUES, AND RESPECTING THE RULE OF LAW

How Does the Council Achieve This?

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 Appeals 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 2022/23.

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 Members' Gifts and Hospitality Register is published and refreshed guidance was issued following a review by the Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee. The Committee also receives an update regarding any declarations of gifts and hospitality quarterly.

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-19 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 Digital Service Transformation, agile working, HR and physical and mental health and wellbeing support. A new Employee Survey is planned for 2022/23.

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 and March 2022 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 Fraud Risk Register was reviewed and updated during 2021/22. 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 which are reviewed annually. 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.



PRINCIPLE B- ENSURING OPENNESS AND COMPREHENSIVE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

How Does the Council Achieve This?

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. The COVID Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel continued to meet during 2021/22 and actively invited stakeholders to attend meetings.

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 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 Neighbourhood Tasking meetings.

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, 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. Ashfield 24/7, the digital platform for residents to access the Council, was launched in February 2022.

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. Discover Ashfield acts as the Town Deal Board and provides oversight of the project programme including the sign off of business cases before submission to Government for approval of funding.

The public was extensively consulted during 2021 regarding the draft Local Plan.

Regeneration officers have created a Business Support Directory.



PRINCIPLE C- DEFINING OUTCOMES IN TERMS OF SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

How Does the Council Achieve This?

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 (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 2022. The Treasury Management Strategy and Related Policy Statements were approved at Audit Committee and Cabinet in February 2022. The Council's updated Capital Strategy, Commercial Property and Investment Strategy and Commercial Property Indicators were approved at Audit Committee and Cabinet in February 2022 before approval at Council in March 2022. The LGA carried out an independent financial health check during December 2021 which was very positive and demonstrated the Council has robust policies and processes in place; the report was published as part of a report to Cabinet in February 2022 and Council in March 2022.

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. The Corporate Risk Strategy, Risk Register and Risk Appetite Framework were approved at Audit Committee and Cabinet in March 2022. The Council's Risk Management processes received a reasonable assurance during a recent internal audit review.

In accordance with the Council's Social Value Policy, to date, from January 2021, in our first year alone, the committed social value for all of the 7 contracts subjected to this route is £1,451,290.

During 2020/21 the Council also adopted the Ashfield Health and Wellbeing Partnership Strategy 2021-25 and the Environmental Charter.



PRINCIPLE D- DETERMINING THE INTERVENTIONS NECESSARY TO OPTIMISE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE INTENDED OUTCOMES

How Does the Council Achieve This?

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)
- Social Housing Regulatory Board

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.

The Corporate Leadership Team considers the priority order for new projects, and their affordability in the context of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.



PRINCIPLE E- DEVELOPING THE ENTITY'S CAPACITY, INCLUDING THE CAPABILITY OF ITS LEADERSHIP AND THE INDIVIDUALS WITHIN IT

How Does the Council Achieve This?

The Leader and Chief Executive have clearly defined roles. Regular meetings between senior managers and Executive Lead Members 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 revised by the Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee in December 2021. Mandatory training has been identified and incorporated into the Code of Conduct. A comprehensive Member Induction programme to ensure new and returning Members are well equipped for their roles as Councillors will be developed by the Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee for implementation in May 2023.

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). A recent internal audit review of People Management arrangements reported a reasonable level of assurance. The digital and service transformation (DST) programme retains an iterative, strategic and operational approach, realigning priority projects to the changing and developing needs of the Council and its residents and is being integrated into the ongoing service review, hybrid working and asset rationalisation programmes underpinned by enhanced customer experience and driving efficiencies through use of technology. 24/7 access to services has been enhanced by the launch of the customer portal and rapid expansion of online payments and 2-way engagement with services. By March 2022, the DST programme had enabled £2 million of efficiencies directly supporting a sustainable medium term financial strategy.



PRINCIPLE F- MANAGING RISKS AND PERFORMANCE THROUGH ROBUST INTERNAL CONTROL AND STRONG PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

How Does the Council Achieve This?

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 LRF's 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. A revised Data Quality Strategy was approved in May 2022.

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 LGA's Financial Health check provided assurance regarding the Council's financial arrangements. Financial Health and Resilience and Payment Card internal audits confirmed a reasonable level of assurance.

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 2022 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 continues to be developed in line with new guidance and advice from the Information Commissioner.

In line with the Social Housing White Paper an action plan was devised and reported to Cabinet twice within the year. The report outlined progress and requirements to ensure that risks and performance were enhanced and presented for regular scrutiny by the 'responsible body' of the Council. A composite 'compliance' risk was also added to the Corporate Risk Register. The social housing function was also benchmarked against other providers on a national basis by Housemark, comparing performance and cost. Housemark provided a benchmarking report and presented it to CLT and Housing DMT.



PRINCIPLE G– IMPLEMENTING GOOD PRACTICES IN TRANSPARENCY, REPORTING, AND AUDIT TO DELIVER EFFECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

How Does the Council Achieve This?

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.

In line with the Regulator of Social Housing's expectation of tenant 'co-regulation' of the Housing Services, the social housing service produced a tenant annual report which provided benchmarked performance and cost data to tenants. Data and policy reviews were also presented, discussed and refreshed with various tenant groups. The department also produced a self-assessment against the Social Housing Ombudsman code which was approved by Cabinet and published on the Council's website.

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).

The Council's Corporate Complaints Strategy and Procedures were reviewed and updated during 2021/22.

