

Annual Governance Statement

Year ended 31 March 2024



*Working for
Warwickshire*

Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

Contents

		<u>Page</u>
1	Executive Summary	3
2	The Governance Framework	4
3	Review of Compliance	7
4	Review of Effectiveness and Improvements	22
5	Governance Issues and Challenges	24
6	Certification	29
Appendix 1	Governance Action Plans	30

1 Executive Summary

Warwickshire County Council's ambition is to make Warwickshire the best it can be, sustainable now and for future generations. We want Warwickshire to be a brilliant County in which to grow up, work and prosper and grow older.

To be successful the Council must have a solid foundation of good governance and sound financial management. Our Council Plan is available on the Council's website (<https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/councilplan>) and describes how the Council will meet the challenges ahead and make the most of opportunities.

Warwickshire's Code of Corporate Governance ensures that we are doing the right things, in the right way, in line with our values. A copy of the Council's Code is available on our website at (<http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/corporategovernance>). Each year the Council is required to produce an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) which describes how its corporate governance arrangements set out in the Code of Corporate Governance have been working. This Statement gives assurances on compliance for the year ending 31 March 2024. The AGS reflects the position, role titles and content relevant to governance arrangements that were in place during 2023/24.

The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive recognise the importance of having a solid foundation of good governance and sound financial management and commit to continue to further enhance our governance arrangements to enable delivery of our Council Plan.

2 The Governance Framework

We are responsible for delivering public services for the benefit of the people of Warwickshire, operating in line with the law and proper accounting standards, and for using public money economically, efficiently and effectively. We also have a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to continually review and improve the way we work, while at the same time offering value for money services.

To meet our responsibility, we have put in place effective governance arrangements for overseeing what we do. These arrangements are intended to make sure that we do the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, open and accountable manner. These arrangements consist of all the systems, processes, culture and values which direct and control the way in which we work and through which we account to, engage with and lead our communities.

We have approved and adopted a **Code of Corporate Governance**, which sets out the principles of the *CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (2016)*.

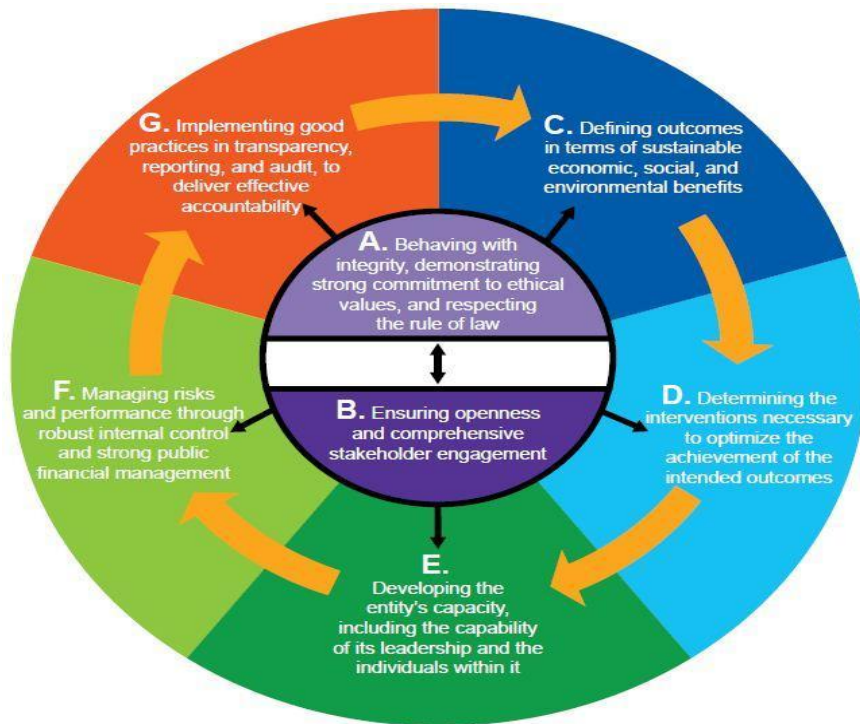


Figure 1: CIPFA's Principles of Good Governance

The Council's Code of Corporate Governance was updated in 2021, approved by Cabinet in April 2021 and is due to be reviewed in late 2024, to present how our governance arrangements support each core governance principle and reflect organisational structures and processes. The full details of our current code and how we meet the seven Principles of Good Governance can be found on our website here:

<http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/corporategovernance>

We continue to monitor external factors that may have an impact on the Council's governance arrangements and will take appropriate action where necessary. International, political and economic events continue to cause significant uncertainty, driving inflation and cost of living challenges. The legal and regulatory framework will continue to change and will present opportunities to update our governance arrangements over time.

The Code of Corporate Governance will be reviewed at least every 4 years, and more frequently if needed. Consequently, governance arrangements in the Code are not repeated in the AGS, which will focus on compliance, effectiveness and improvements to the Framework.

The aim of the governance framework

Our Framework allows us to direct resources in accordance with our priorities, monitor how we are achieving our strategic aims and ambitions, and to consider whether they have helped us to deliver appropriate services. The Framework also aims to assure we deliver value for money by applying specifically governance processes aligned to:

- Principle C: defining outcomes that have impact.
- Principle D: optimising achievement of outcomes that are effective.
- Principle F: strong financial management that delivers economic and efficient solutions.

The Annual Governance Statement provides assurances that these processes are working in practice and provide services in line with our priorities by delivering on our supporting priority, we will be a great Council and partner.

Figure 2: The Council's Three Strategic Priorities



We want Warwickshire to have a **thriving economy and places** that have the right jobs, skills, education, and infrastructure.



We want to be a County where all **people can live their best lives**; where communities and individuals are supported to live safely, healthily, happily and independently.



We want to be a **County with a sustainable future** which means adapting to and mitigating climate change and meeting net zero commitments, so that our generation ensures future generations can live well and reap the benefits of a sustainable and thriving Warwickshire.

Financial Management Code of Practice

Our Code of Corporate Governance was enhanced by adopting CIPFA's Financial Management Code of Practice in 2021/22 and compliance with the Code is reviewed on an annual basis as part of the AGS process. The annual refresh of the CIPFA Financial Management Code Self-Assessment was reported to the Audit and Standards Committee in March 2024. This provided assurance that the Council complies with the standards set out within the Code. The Committee also considered progress on the delivery of the Code's improvement action plan and approved a new action plan for 2024/25. Given the Council is already compliant with the Code, the improvement action plan entails continuing to push for best practice in relevant areas, rather than simply settling for basic compliance.

We are alert to ensuring our governance arrangements support the Council as a whole and individual services to deliver value for money across all our activity and at all levels of accountability, and we continue to seek to adapt and improve our governance arrangements in that regard.

3 Review of compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance

We confirmed that arrangements under each of seven governance principles continue to be applied. Many of the changes adopted through the pandemic have now become established as part of the Council’s governance arrangements and as we adapted to new ways of working during 2022/23 and 2023/24. We have set out below, for each governance principle, our self-assessment of compliance in the year 2023/24.

Table1: Summary of Compliance against the Code of Corporate Governance

Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law	
Compliance Overview	<p>The key policies, procedures and practices set out in the Code of Corporate Governance remained in place and were applied throughout the year. Our values and behaviours underpin our governance arrangements and are at the heart of all we do and our performance management.</p> <p>We have continued to meet the Public Sector Duty, as set out in the Equality Act 2010 and do not consider that we have unlawfully discriminated in the provision of services whether delivered by us or commissioned externally. Equality Impact Assessments have also continued to be produced to inform all appropriate decisions during the financial year.</p>
	<p>Integrity is incorporated into the Council’s behaviours, which are clearly defined and accessible on the intranet. To ensure our behaviours are upheld we have codes of conduct for officers and members (aligned with the Nolan Principles), registers of gifts and hospitality, registers of financial interests, and policies on counter-fraud and whistleblowing (the latter was updated in November 2023).</p> <p>We reviewed our Member Code of Conduct against the LGA Model Code, and a new updated Code of Conduct was agreed at Council in July 2021. Following that, we have undertaken several refresher training sessions for members on conduct and behaviours annually. As part of those sessions, we consider any developments in law or guidance on member conduct and update members. If there are any significant developments, these will form the basis of a further formal review of the Code https://democracy.warwickshire.gov.uk/documents/s14878/Revised%20Member%20Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf.</p> <p>A formal induction programme for Members is undertaken following each quadrennial election which covers the legal principles governing decision making and the Code of Conduct. The programme also incorporates commercial awareness to ensure that members understand their responsibilities in relation to governance of commercial activity. Member induction and training also covers a broader understanding of Council finances and the key Committee and Officer roles responsible for governing our finances as well as the wider responsibilities of the Council and the services it provides. This is supplemented annually by on-going Member refresher training for key areas like finance.</p>

We aim in our member development programme to cover a broad range of training relevant to the services provided by the Council. Some of these are repeated regularly (such as Complaints and Code of Conduct training) and where issues or specific requirements are identified (including by request of members) additional sessions are sourced. During 2023/24, this included three sessions on SEND (February, April and June 2023), Community Powered Warwickshire, Code of Conduct (in September and October 2023), Children and Families, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health, CQC and the Care Act.

This year demonstrated an additional need around SEND awareness, use of appropriate language and more general understanding. As a result, development sessions are now planned, co-produced, and delivered with the SEND community. Membership changes were also made as a result for the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee along with the introduction of additional mandatory training for members.

Specific training is required for members to sit on a regulatory committee and ongoing knowledge sessions also take place in advance of the committee meetings. Bespoke training has also been provided for participants of the Police & Crime Panel and all members are regularly advised of external sessions from groups such as Local Government Association, Information Commissioners Office, Warwickshire Police and others that are relevant to them as members. This has included training around personal safety (online and in person) and local government finance. Bespoke training has been conducted for members of the Pension Fund Investment Sub Committee and the Local Pension Board.

We include ethical values in policies and procedures for all areas including procurement and partnership working. We have a Complaints Policy and a corporate complaints and feedback procedure to ensure that all complaints are investigated and are responded to as quickly as possible (<http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/complaints>). When complaints are received about councillors, these are investigated under our standards procedures. We celebrate the diversity of our customers, workforce and the wider Warwickshire community. Our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and fulfilling our Public Sector Equality Duty is integral to everything we do including policy development, service delivery and partnership working to ensure that we do not unlawfully discriminate in the services we deliver or commission (<http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/equality>).

Our Constitution (<https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/constitution>), including Contract Standing Orders and Financial Regulations were reviewed during 2022/23. Minor updates were made during the 2023/24 financial year to ensure that they remained legislatively compliant and reflect the organisation's operating arrangements. Since then, there have been further changes approved by full Council in September 2023 to reflect the split of the People Directorate into two areas (under the Executive Director for Children & Young People and the Executive Director for Social Care & Health). Other changes have been approved in year including a new Cabinet portfolio being established for Education, (formerly Education was covered by the Children & Families Cabinet portfolio), approved by the Leader in May 2023, and amendments of the Petitions Schemes in 2023, approved by full Council in December 2023.

The Constitution sets out the decision-making framework to ensure that all officers, key post holders and Members can fulfil their responsibilities in accordance with legislative requirements. All our reports to member bodies receive financial and legal checks prior to submission to ensure they comply with regulatory requirements. Our Monitoring Officer receives weekly reports to alert her to any legal issues which she shares with the Section 151 / Deputy Section 151 Officers and the Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service). The Chief Executive, Section 151 / Deputy Section 151 Officers and Monitoring Officer meet regularly to ensure any regulatory requirements are addressed and any regulatory risks are discussed and visible.

All officers with budget responsibilities receive training on general financial management and specifics around financial policies, procedures, systems and propriety.

Cabinet approved the Procurement and Contract Management Strategy in November 2022. A new Procurement Bill, which will alter existing procurement legislation, received Royal Assent in October 2023 to become the Procurement Act 2023. In March 2024, the Procurement Regulations 2024 were laid in Parliament to bring some elements of the Bill and the wider regime into effect. The new regulations were originally planned to go 'live' on 28th October 2024 but this has been delayed with the new date of 24th February 2025 has been proposed. The existing legislation will apply until the new regime goes live and will also continue to apply to procurement started under the old rules. In preparation for the new regime an officer group has been established which is working on the anticipated changes and how they will impact on current practice. Detailed training has also been sourced from external experts. Once the secondary legislation is published, updates will be needed to Contract Standing Orders and the Constitution will be reviewed generally in terms of financial and other delegations to ensure legislative compliance. Proposed amendments will be considered by the Cabinet before approval by full Council.

The Joint Consultative Committee meets on a quarterly basis providing the opportunity for elected employee representatives to meet with senior management and discuss issues affecting the whole workforce including Health & Safety. Teacher Trade Unions meet separately with the Director of Education to discuss Education and Schools specific items. We have a positive working relationship with the Trade Unions and they are proactively involved at a Directorate level in relation to change management and individual casework.

We are registered as a data controller under the Data Protection Act as we collect, and process personal information and we have named Data Protection Officers who sit within the Information Governance team. We have General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliant procedures that explain how we use and share information and arrangements for members of the public to access information. We have adopted the model publication scheme produced by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (<https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/publicationschemeguide>).

The Commercial Delivery Group meets at least quarterly and is Chaired by the Executive Director for Resources. The Group exists to enhance arrangements and oversee delivery of our Commercial Strategy ensuring the Council optimises

commercial performance, becomes a more commercially focused organisation and invests in new commercial opportunities that bring financial returns as well as wider economic benefits for Warwickshire.

Trading companies, wholly or partly owned by the Council, are scrutinised and challenged through shareholder representatives and for wholly owned companies, performance is monitored through senior officer governance groups (the Commercial Delivery Group and the Warwickshire Property & Development Officer Governance Group (WPDG)) on a quarterly basis. There is also a Member Oversight Group, which considers WPDG and Warwickshire Investment Fund (WIF) activity and developments. In some instances, Council officers are appointed as Directors or shareholder representatives and we deliver training for these officers on issues of importance. In January 2024 an external legal firm provided training covering the areas of insolvency and duties and responsibilities. A further session remains to be arranged which can be available to any other interested groups. Annual General Meetings are held by all trading companies to allow the Council as shareholder to further review annual performance and influence company governance procedures. Directors of relevant companies have also received “conflict of interest” awareness training and we actively monitor the risk of potential conflicts. Investments are governed by appropriate documents, for example loan agreements.

The Council operates an anti-money laundering policy, and the Director of Finance (Deputy Section 151 Officer) is the Council’s Anti-Money Laundering Responsible Officer (AMLRO).

Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Compliance Overview The key policies, procedures and practices set out in the Code of Corporate Governance remained in place and were applied throughout the year.

Council and Committee meetings are available as webcasts (<https://warwickshire.public-l.tv/core/portal/webcasts>), and decisions are recorded and published. In line with legislation formal meetings allow for public attendance and we have a petitions scheme and a public speaking scheme that govern participation. Significant decisions involve public consultations where required. During 2023/24 this has included an extensive public consultation on the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service proposals related to Resourcing to Risk.

The Warwickshire Youth Council represents the voice of young people in Warwickshire. Every two years, young people across Warwickshire vote for self-nominated young people to represent them. Those elected meet monthly at Shire Hall and have the responsibility of campaigning and ensuring that the voice of young people is heard across the Council. Each area of Warwickshire also has a Youth Forum which represents young people at a more local level.

Our budget is informed by the priorities set in the Council Plan 2022-27 which drew upon extensive public consultation. Additionally, we undertake an annual consultation on the budget engaging with business rate paying representatives and trade union representatives in line with our legal requirements.

We continue to be guided by the Children and Young People Strategy 2021 - 2030 which has Child Friendly Warwickshire at its heart. Approved by Cabinet in October 2021, the Strategy outlines the Council's commitment to ensuring children and young people have a voice and are supported to be the best they can be. The Strategy's goals and ambitions were shaped by feedback from a survey completed by over a thousand young people across Warwickshire and will be the Council's approach to working with partners, families and communities between now and 2030 to help young people reach their potential. Throughout 2023/24, we have continued to be guided by this Strategy, which has informed the updated Council Delivery Plan for 2024/25. We will complete a review of progress against the Strategy and report to elected members in 2024/25.

Warwickshire County Council, as "Corporate Parents", have high aspirations for our children in care and care experienced young people. We are committed to hearing the voice of those children through engagement with the Children in Care Council which seeks to improve services for children (<https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/childrenincare>). In 2023/24, alongside the Children in Care Council we have also had proactive involvement from the Care Leaver Forum and developed a Young Person's Forum for SEND called IMPACT and Warwickshire Parent Carer Voice to engage further. Additionally, we are developing a parent participation group to engage and gain further feedback.

The Council's Co-Production Framework document, which has been in place since 2022, and communicates our approach to ensure that people providing and people using services work together to design or improve a service that will achieve a better outcome. The Framework provides guidance for people carrying out co-production activities to ensure these are consistent in approach and follow good practice. The Council has also commissioned a call off arrangement with preferred suppliers to provide direct specialist engagement and co-production activities with customers and potential future customers of services.

The Warwickshire Healthy Ageing Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) looking at the needs and assets of the older population in Warwickshire undertook two pieces of engagement work, a series of focus groups and a survey, to capture the voice of local residents and their experiences of ageing within Warwickshire in the JSNA. A multi-agency steering group oversaw the process which endeavoured to hear from a range of residents, including those who are seldom heard, and provided a 'you said we did' summary which was published following the engagement to demonstrate how the findings have helped inform action. The three health place partnerships are represented on the JSNA Strategic Group and fed into developing and signing off the JSNA work programme. Following publication of the JSNA we have presented it to the three health place partnerships who develop their own actions in response. More information on the Warwickshire Healthy Ageing

JSNA, and the two engagement pieces of work, can be found here (<https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/directory-record/7896/healthy-ageing-jsna-2024>).

We have an Employee Engagement Strategy to ensure employees have a voice, that managers and leaders hear and can act on staff feedback and that they continue to focus on coaching and developing their people, and there is clear communication about the direction of our Council. This is supported by employee forums and regular employee surveys, regular check in surveys which measure employee engagement and our direction of travel against Our People Strategy Delivery Plan which includes our people related measures.

Regular Corporate Board and Executive Director live broadcasts, supported by Director and Team briefings and transmissions are now embedded as a way to engage with our people irrespective of working arrangements (remote, office based or hybrid). Feedback from employees in the 'Your Say Survey' to February 2024 highlights an increase in the employee engagement score to 79% (76% in February 2023), with 81% (79% in February 2023) of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that 'Our internal communications keep me updated on what is happening'. Additional information is also provided through various mechanisms for example through regular briefings, Working 4 Warwickshire bulletin issued weekly, the intranet pages are updated as necessary and highlight topical themes.

The Warwickshire Pension Fund is governed by a Staff and Pensions Committee and a Pension Fund Investment Sub-Committee populated by Councillors, and a Local Pension Board which has representatives from employers and members, and through direct communications for example directly sharing new policies such as the Funding Strategy Statement for comment. The Pension Fund is currently rolling out online member self-service, which is improving the accessibility of information for members. There is also a Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Local Pension Board of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits

Compliance Overview

We have a clear set of priority outcomes in our five-year Council Plan 2022-27 and associated deliverables in our two-year Integrated Delivery Plan (IDP), applicable for the whole of 2023/24, and superseded by the Council Delivery Plan (CDP) from April 2024. The Council Plan has three priorities, which remain unchanged, as follows:

- Priority 1, A County with a thriving economy and places with the right jobs, skills, and infrastructure (Economy & Places);
- Priority 2, A place where people can live their best lives; where communities and individuals are supported to live safely, healthily, happily, and independently (People & Communities); and
- Priority 3, A County with sustainable futures which means adapting to and mitigating climate change and meeting net zero commitments (Sustainability).

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) supports the delivery of the Council Plan and is based on clear assumptions. Resources are aligned to priorities and ensure a balanced budget to sustain services and the longer-term financial health of the Council. The MTFS process, which includes scenario planning, assists with forward planning and responding to variations in financial forecasts and changes to assumptions. All Committee decisions identify any financial and environmental implications linked to the decisions in the reports.

The Council Plan 2022 – 2027 was approved and became effective from 1 April 2022. For 2023-24 it has been supported by the IDP which was approved by Cabinet in May 2022 and has been refreshed and approved in May 2023. Through the latter part of 2023/24 we have worked to develop a sharper and more focused CDP which supersedes the IDP. The CDP was approved by Cabinet in April 2024 and is also effective from April. The CDP has a focus on the priority deliverables, those actions that matter most to Warwickshire. It is supported by Service Business Plans, which are also being updated during the early part of 2024/25 to incorporate key change projects and investments to develop the actions needed to deliver priorities. Projects and investments are scrutinised to ensure they deliver against the required outcomes. We have also adopted a Strategy Framework which provides supporting guidance for officers in developing core and supporting strategies to help ensure consistency.

Capital programme management is overseen by the Capital Strategy Group which meets regularly, is chaired by the Director of Finance and administered by the Strategic Finance team. The Investigation Design Fund (IDF) continues to be utilised by services to provide up front funding to gain cost certainty on capital projects prior to approval of the full budget. This process and fund is monitored by the Strategic Finance Team. The IDF forms part of the three stage approval process for all Capital Investment Fund projects which was implemented as part of the Capital Financial Management Improvement Project.

A significant element of the capital programme is in the Communities Directorate, the Communities Capital Control Board reviews capital forecasting against actual expenditure and adjusts as required to provide effective performance management. Capital performance measures are currently being reviewed for 2024/25 to ensure the most effective measures are in place to provide oversight of performance. These measures will be agreed with and reported on by the Strategic Finance Team. The appraisal process for developments includes regard for ESG factors.

Priorities and a programme of actions for tackling climate change and delivering the Council's net zero targets are included in the CDP and all Council reports identify environmental implications. Warwickshire is committed to reducing emissions from areas that the Council has direct control over including its own transport, gas and bought electricity to net zero by 2030. The Council has also committed to working with all partners and residents in Warwickshire to support the County to net zero by 2050.

The Sustainable Futures Strategy and accompanying Delivery Plan was approved by Cabinet in November 2023. This provides the framework and trajectory to deliver our net zero ambitions for the Council by 2030 and the County by 2050. Development of the Strategy was supported by a significant stakeholder engagement, including a series of external panels with contributions from the public and private sector, community and business representation, alongside academic and expert contributions.

In March 2024 Cabinet approved progressing a Level 2 Devolution Deal for Warwickshire and entering into a devolution agreement with Government, which was announced in the Chancellor's budget statement of March 2024. This deal will include devolution of the Adult Education Budget, responsibility for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the ability to input into the Local Skill Improvement Plan (LSIP). The Devolution Deal offers enhanced local control over funding whilst retaining the ability to operate devolved powers at a strategic county wide scale to maximise impact, align with wider local activity and enable greater focus on local need.

Warwickshire Pension Fund has completed the 2022 triennial valuation with a positive data quality assessment and updated Funding Strategy Statement. The Pension Fund has a Climate Risk Investment Strategy in place, and the Council's own Investment Strategy for non-treasury investments includes a dedicated ethical investment policy.

Warwickshire Property & Development Group (WPDG) is now trading, with the Joint Venture, Develop Warwickshire, having been successfully established. WPDG will play an important role in shaping Warwickshire as a place to invest, live and thrive. The Warwickshire Investment Fund (WIF, previously WRIF) continues to be active, with the relevant capacity and contracts in place for the services and expertise required to manage the Fund. The Fund is managed by an Investment Panel. Both the WPDG and WIF have dedicated oversight from a Member Oversight Group, and further related governance arrangements are referenced in Principle A.

Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

Compliance Overview	The key arrangements for managing performance and delivery, to inform interventions, continued to operate throughout the year.
	Arrangements are in place to report critical management information on the key aspects of delivery of the Council Plan, including finance (monthly), risk and performance (quarterly) to Corporate Board and quarterly to Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny Committees. The frequency and the content of risk reporting has been enhanced in 2023/24 and there have been conversations with Directors about risk each quarter to ensure that risk reporting is topical and up to date.

Additionally, all Directors have signed off statements providing assurance that they have been managing risks in their service areas.

Our Performance Framework supports the delivery of the Council Plan, and includes mechanisms to assess progress, inform actions and interventions to achieve intended outcomes and benefits. The Change Programmes Team monitor and scrutinise project delivery against plans and highlight actions needed to manage escalated risks and deliver project objectives. Each Directorate has escalation arrangements in place to its Directorate Leadership Team and performance reporting flows through the executive structure and through Directorate Leadership Teams in the normal course of business. We track delivery against the Council Plan on a quarterly basis alongside information on risk and performance. Our overall performance is reported quarterly to Corporate Board, Overview and Scrutiny Committees, and ultimately to Cabinet.

Delivery of Council Plan outcomes is achieved through multiple mechanisms including business plans, strategies and programmes/projects. This is supported by business insight, commissioning, performance, and corporate policy functions. The appraisal system links Council objectives and priorities to individuals' personal objectives and personal development plans.

Despite the significant financial challenges that have faced the Council in 2023/24, in common with all upper tier authorities, financial monitoring governance has been appropriate during the year. Reflecting the heightened challenges around Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, Home to School transport, children's and adults' social care, we have developed a new executive-led Budget Delivery Oversight Group to increase scrutiny around the budgets, associated expenditure, proposed savings and their delivery during 2024/25.

Our Service Business Continuity Plans and procedures set out mitigating actions and contingency plans in response to business interruption events. We work in partnership with Coventry and Solihull Councils as part of the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire (CSW) Resilience Team, linking with the Warwickshire Local Resilience Forum to actively manage Civil Contingency requirements and responses (<https://cswprepared.org.uk/>).

Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

Compliance
Overview

The key arrangements for building our capacity and capability continued to operate throughout the year. Leadership forums, including Senior Leadership Forum were maintained.

A member development programme is delivered each year to ensure the core development needs of members, aligned to their respective roles, are met and to take account of new and emerging issues, further detail is recorded in Principle A.

Our People Strategy ensures our workforce can deliver the Council Plan and that they remain aligned with our vision and behaviours. Direction continued to be determined by Corporate Board with progress being overseen by the Director of Workforce and Local Services, a new post and service effective from November 2023. The Staff and Pensions Committee provides overall oversight of the development of our people and approves the Our People Strategy and Annual Delivery Plan. Our Agile Working Principles set out how employees can work as efficiently and productively as possible, whilst maintaining a priority focus on service needs.

The Our People Strategy recognises that the Council's people are its primary asset to enable the delivery of exceptional services to Warwickshire's communities. The Strategy is aimed at delivering our vision for the Council to be a great place to work where diverse and talented people are enabled to be their best. A key driver for our priority activities is ensuring a future focus on our ambition of having the right people, with the right skills in the right place influencing some structural changes in 2023/24 which have evolved and enhanced the Council's ways of working and better aligned resources to strategic priorities. The Strategy is our mechanism to have an effective approach in our key themes of strategic workforce planning, recruitment and retention, reward and recognition, leadership, equality, diversity and inclusion and wellbeing.

We have recently launched our refreshed approach to leadership which outlines our commitment, expectations and the support that is available for our leaders. This includes a differentiated development offer which enables colleagues to continue their progression at all stages from preparing for leadership to inspiring other leaders.

We have a corporate process for annual appraisals and personal development plans supported by regular 1:1 conversations. This provides the necessary clarity of expectations and behaviour, direction, support and opportunities for growth and development and allows employees and managers to have constructive discussions on performance, progress against outcomes, wellbeing and development. The appraisal process is aligned to the Council's Behaviours Framework and our recruitment process for senior managers applies a behavioural assessment process, which includes leadership capability and identifies personal development areas.

We have a Senior Leadership Forum (SLF) for our top three management tiers primarily for leadership and strategic organisational matters. The SLF has continued to meet regularly and effectively both in person and virtually as appropriate.

We invest in the health and wellbeing of our employees with a Workplace Wellness Strategy and supporting policies and processes including those to manage sickness absence and return to work. The health & wellbeing of our people remains a top priority and as well as engaging with employees as stakeholders we have a focus on building a resilient and high performing workforce. This means we maintain wellbeing and HR policy information on dedicated intranet sites (Keeping

You Well and Working, Working4Warwickshire) with links to active internal and external support networks, resources and employee well-being check in surveys; and actions arising from those surveys. We also hold regular live staff broadcasts from Corporate Board and Executive Directors, which help to communicate key well-being messages, updates and these allow for questions & answers. Further staff engagement takes place within services.

We have continued our approach from last year to listening to the voice of our people, through our 'Your Say' engagement survey. We continue to work towards achieving 'silver' Thrive at Work accreditation, part of which has included a check in survey, where we saw an increase in our wellbeing score from 77% to 82%. The main 'Your Say' survey has seen an increase in both our participation rate from 43% to 56% and our engagement score is now 79%, referenced in Principle B. Workload continues to be a focus and we have seen a slight increase in workload being manageable from 64% to 66%. Sickness absence has started to increase in line with national trends and we have put in place a proactive action plan to address this.

Our strategic Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) agenda is guided by Corporate Board and the Council's EDI Group will ensure this agenda is translated into practice. The EDI Group is chaired by the Head of HR Strategy and is comprised of diverse employees from across the Council, advised by the EDI team.

The Council's previous move to the Cloud-based Microsoft 365 environment has secured communication and data security and has also enhanced our ability to work remotely and collaboratively. Usage of 365 has continued throughout 2023/24 and a portfolio of training materials is available to all employees via the Council's intranet.

Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

Compliance
Overview

The regulations, policies and governance arrangements set out in the Code of Corporate Governance have been fully applied throughout the year for the Council and for Warwickshire Pension Fund.

Risk management is an integral part of good corporate governance and management and is therefore at the heart of what we do. The Council adopted a new Strategic Risk Management Framework (the Framework) in April 2021 and our approach to managing risk is explained therein. The Framework was refreshed in 2023 and agreed by Cabinet in January 2024. Our strategic risk register has been refreshed and updated in 2023/24 with individual strategic risks reviewed quarterly. Service level risks have also been identified, assessed and captured in service level risk registers. Service areas have reviewed and updated risks throughout the year and work continues to embed consistency across the Council.

The Council continues to apply the CIPFA Code of Practice for Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption and this is reflected in our Counter Fraud, Bribery & Corruption Framework (<http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/antifraud>).

Strong financial management is achieved through a robust Medium-Term Financial Strategy process which includes comprehensive involvement of Elected Members and Corporate Board to enable the delivery of the priorities, outcomes and objectives set out in the Council Plan and achieving a balance between robustness of financial management and achieving the Council's ambitions.

The Council's budget is set as part of a five-year Medium Term Financial Strategy, which is reviewed annually to ensure we remain prudent, robust and ambitious, whilst being flexible and responsive to emerging situations. The Council's strong financial management includes a range of activities and controls including policies and procedures relating to financial management (financial planning, budgetary control and accounting), procurement, contracting and investment.

Our control arrangements for procurement and contract management are being reconsidered in light of the new procurement legislation, which has been covered within Principle A above.

Our Performance Framework supports the delivery of the Council Plan, and includes mechanisms to assess progress, inform actions and interventions to achieve intended outcomes. Progress against the Council Plan and the MTFs is assessed through evaluation of Key Business Measures (KBMs), which are used in reporting to Overview & Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet on a quarterly basis. A suite of reports and dashboards provides HR, finance, risk and performance data to Executive Directors, Directors and Heads of Service for their areas of responsibility. This enables managers to interrogate information quickly and efficiently and identify any interventions needed.

For revenue programmes and projects governance arrangements have been consistent throughout the 2023/24 year and consolidate the change made in 2022/23. All revenue programmes and projects have been governed through the Directorate Leadership Teams during 2023/24 with each Executive Director responsible for reporting back to Corporate Board and/or escalating by exception. Two cross cutting boards have remained reporting to Corporate Board, Sustainable Futures and Creating Opportunities (Levelling Up).

Where the Change Programmes Team provide officer support in the delivery of programmes and projects delivery is to our professional standards and this includes the use of our system for programme and project governance. Overall responsibility for leading the implementation and change governance controls (including escalation) rests with the business and specifically the Executive Director or Corporate Board.

We have an effective system of internal audit delivered in line with the Public Sector Internal Auditing Standards and effective counter-fraud and corruption arrangements as well as whistleblowing policies (updated November 2023) and procedures.

Internal Audit provide advice to service areas and change projects to help ensure the control environment remains strong. There is regular reporting on audit assurance outcomes to Audit & Standards Committee.

All public sector internal audit services are required to measure how well they are conforming to the standards. This can be achieved through undertaking periodic self-assessments, external quality assessments, or a combination of both methods. However, the standards state that an external reviewer must undertake a full assessment or validate the Internal Audit Service's own self-assessment at least once in a five-year period.

In February 2023, an independent review was performed by a representative of CIPFA to determine how Internal Audit has applied the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards PSIAS (revised 2016, 2017 and to be revised again for implementation in January 2025 following updating of global standards in January 2024) and CIPFA Local Government Application Note (LGAN) in practice. The review confirmed compliance with all requirements and there were no areas of partial or non-compliance. The audit opinion stated, "It is our opinion that the self-assessment for the Warwickshire County Council's Internal Audit Service is accurate, and we therefore conclude that the *Internal Audit Service generally conforms to the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the CIPFA Local Government Application Note.*"

We gain assurances on internal control from:

- Director annual assurance statements;
- social care quality assurance policy and procedures;
- the Internal Audit work programme reports;
- risk management arrangements; and
- external sources of assurance including external audit opinions, statutory inspections, third party reviews and whole council or service specific peer reviews.

In the 2024/25 Investment Strategy, the Warwickshire Investment Fund was reshaped. This included closing the bulk of the Business Investment Growth pillar of the Fund as demand was not sufficient. The other pillars of the fund remain active.

We actively promote safeguarding to prevent harm and reduce the risk of abuse or neglect, working with partners as Warwickshire Safeguarding (<https://www.safeguardingwarwickshire.co.uk/>).

Principle G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability

Compliance Overview

We endeavour always to be open and transparent. The regulations, policies and governance arrangements set out in the Code of Corporate Governance have been applied throughout the year for the Council and for the Warwickshire Pension Fund and can be accessed here (<https://www.warwickshirepensionfund.org.uk>).

Each year we publish information on our website outlining how we spend Council Tax income (<http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/counciltaxspending>).

We have a forward plan which provides information about the key decisions that the Council has scheduled. Formal agendas, reports and minutes for all committee meetings are published on our website which ensures that people know what decisions the Council is planning to take, and the decisions taken. Live and recorded webcasts of formal public meetings are available (<http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/democracy>).

Corporate Board, supported by Directorate Leadership Teams, takes responsibility for providing overall leadership and strategic direction to officers and specifically, for ensuring that the Council meets its statutory obligations and exercises sound corporate governance, effective resource management, and that the performance of the Council is managed effectively, including the delivery of key aspects of our change programmes.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees act as a critical friend and hold Cabinet to account for its decisions. The terms of reference for all Overview and Scrutiny Committees are defined in the Constitution (<http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/scrutiny>). The Audit and Standards Committee has oversight of internal and external audit matters, the Council's arrangements for corporate governance and risk management and any other measures for the maintenance of probity. In line with good practice, the Committee is chaired by an independent member and the Council has appointed a second independent member to sit on the Committee.

All reports that go to Members through a formal Committee, or for Leader / Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder decisions, are considered by legal and finance colleagues who sign-off as the final stage before being released by Democratic Services. We use the Mod.Gov. system to manage our development of committee reports and this supports consistent governance arrangements and appropriate checks through the report writing process.

The Internal Audit Manager is designated as the Head of Internal Audit. Internal Audit reports regularly to the Corporate Board, and the internal audit service is subject to Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) external quality assessments. Sufficient audits have been conducted to provide an annual audit opinion for the year.

The Council has been subject to an Ofsted inspection, an International Standardization for Organization (ISO) audit and a His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection in the year:

- Warwickshire County Council Children's Home received its first Ofsted inspection in August 2023 and the inspection rating provided was Good.
- The Council received an audit relating to the internationally recognised ISO 14001 Environmental Management Standard in January 2024, which the Council already held. The outcome of the audit is that certification has been maintained by the Council.
- Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service received a HMICFRS Inspection in 2023/24, which reported in September 2023. The inspection framework has changed since the last inspection in March 2021, which means that it is not possible to make direct comparisons. The report concludes that the inspectors were satisfied with aspects of the performance of the Service, but there are areas in which the service needs to improve. We have added an associated action within the Governance Improvement Plan.

4 Review of effectiveness and improvements to governance arrangements

We have approved and adopted a **Code of Corporate Governance**, which sets out the principles of the *CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (2016)*. We have responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of our governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of managers who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment and by the Head of Internal Audit's annual report.

The review of effectiveness was co-ordinated by an evaluation panel consisting of representatives from across the Council Directorates (Resources, Communities and People [Children and Young People and Social Care and Health from 1st January 2024]) and Internal Audit.

In carrying out its review, the evaluation panel:

- considered the approach of the Council to establishing its principal statutory obligations and organisational objectives;
- considered the approach of the Council to identifying principal risks to the achievement of those obligations and objectives;
- identified the key control frameworks that the Council has in place to manage its principal risks;
- obtained assurance from managers on the operation of key control frameworks and on the results of relevant external or internal inspections;
- reviewed progress against the Governance Action Plan (Appendix 1); and
- evaluated the assurances provided and identified any gaps.

Where colleagues were unable to attend, we have engaged a sample of Directors in developing the AGS content and sought their contributions. Additionally, all Directors have been provided with access to the draft AGS and given the opportunity to contribute further. Directors have confirmed that they have complied with the risk management framework throughout the year and each Director has provided an assurance statement towards year end.

Consideration was also given to the results of reviews carried out by external regulators and agencies during the year including the external audit of the accounts. The work of the evaluation panel was scrutinised by the Director of Strategy, Planning and Governance (Monitoring Officer), the Director of Finance (Deputy Section 151 Officer), Executive Director of Resources (Section 151 Officer), Executive Director for Children & Young People and Executive Director for Social Care & Health, Executive Director and Chief Executive before being submitted to the Audit & Standards Committee in May 2024 for further scrutiny.

The results of Internal Audit and External Audit work were reported to the Audit and Standards Committee throughout the year. The individual reviews feed into the overall Internal Audit Annual Report. This report concludes that the Council's control environment provides **Moderate** assurance that the significant risks facing the Authority are addressed. The Audit and Standards Committee also considers in greater detail areas where limited assurance opinions have been provided. The internal audit findings, including those with a limited assurance opinion, were duly considered in the preparation of the annual assurance opinion and this Statement. Annual external audit risk assessments are undertaken by the Council in conjunction with the external auditors and these are reported to the Audit and Standards Committee.

The Governance Improvement Action Plan (Appendix 1) presents, on an exception basis, additional actions that are already planned or being considered to inform future Council planning and strengthen governance. The process of review has also captured other governance improvements in each of the principles above.

5 Governance issues and challenges

We have not experienced any major governance failures during the last year and our arrangements remain fit for purpose and in accordance with the governance framework. A primary purpose of the governance framework is to identify and manage strategic risks proactively and to ensure risks are appropriately mitigated.

Warwickshire County Council has three strategic priorities to make Warwickshire the best it can be, sustainable now and for future generations. The most significant strategic risks that exist at the end of 2023/24 are presented against the three strategic priorities along with a highlight of the action that is being taken to help reduce risk levels, which have been high as a result of an extremely uncertain and volatile operational and financial environment. The Strategic Risk Management Framework has been updated in 2023/24 and been approved by Corporate Board in November 2023 and Cabinet in January 2024. The Council's strategic risks have been reconsidered and refreshed during the year, agreed with Corporate Board and Cabinet and used for the purpose of this AGS. Quarterly risk reviews have taken place throughout the year. It is worth noting that a number of global issues, including macro-economic factors, inflationary pressures and international conflict continue to influence the Council's view of risk.

The Council Plan 2022-2027 has been in place throughout the year along with the IDP, which sets out the ambitions and priorities of the Council and how those will be achieved. Monitoring of the delivery has taken place consistently and quarterly reports are prepared and presented to relevant Member bodies, Corporate Board, and the respective Directorate Leadership Teams. Towards the end of 2023/24 the Council started to develop a more focused Council Delivery Plan, superseding the IDP from April 2024, to capture how we will deliver the most significant. Quarterly stocktakes have continued throughout 2023/24 and these consider the Council's delivery across its portfolio, its performance and any emerging issues, risks or cross-cutting themes.

Restructuring of elements of the organisation has taken place in 2023/24, with Director responsibilities being reshaped and reallocated from November 2023. The reshaped director portfolios help address two key strategic risks around workforce and climate change and maintain a focus on the Council Plan. From January 2024, a new Executive Director role was established, Executive Director of Social Care & Health, taking responsibility for the associated teams. The Executive Director of People is now the Executive Director of Children & Young People and takes on Education & Children's Services.

The following table provides a summary of the activity relating to the strategic risks, which were live and high level at the end of 2023/24:

Strategic Risk Ref.	Strategic Risk Description	Activity
Strategic Priority 2, A place where people can live their best lives, where communities and individuals are supported to live safely, healthily, happily, and independently		
2	Mismatch between demand and resources	<p>The Council operates regional commissioning for children's placements and is planning further development and growth of children's homes to help address demand and affordability challenges. WCC has taken part in the Department for Education's Delivering Better Value Programme to consider the pressures which local systems are experiencing delivering SEND services. This is aimed at ensuring services are sustainable however, the forecasting demonstrates that demand is expected to continue to increase over the next five years and will not be sustainably funded over that period. Warwickshire is not alone in this respect, this being a national issue, and we continue to keep the situation under close review.</p> <p>Capital development, building additional schools in areas of need, is also being undertaken and is aimed at mitigating pressures and particularly around sufficiency, SEND and 'Home to School' transport. Challenges do, however, exist to balance plans for capital development with the availability of funding, which is exacerbated by rising costs.</p> <p>Development of a cross-cutting Adult Social Care Strategy is underway with a focus on prevention and early intervention to ensure the Council is meeting the needs of the population and promoting independence wherever possible (a key principle of the Care Act).</p> <p>A Commissioning Strategy for 2024 onwards is being developed, which includes the need for Make, Do, Buy decisions for all future commissioning. Executive Directors and Directors are also undertaking end to end process reviews within their directorates which puts the customer at the heart of activity whilst considering demand and available resources.</p> <p>The Council has maintained and agreed a rolling five-year Medium Term Financial Strategy and associated process which includes prudent assumptions using reserves to help manage risk, debt capacity is assessed annually, financial recovery plans initiated as appropriate, capital forecasting modules are utilised, timely financial monitoring and reporting has taken place throughout the year as part of the governance arrangements.</p>

Strategic Priority 3, A place with sustainable futures, which means adapting to and mitigating climate change and meeting net zero commitments

4	Lack of movement towards sustainable futures.	The final Sustainable Futures Strategy and accompanying Delivery Plan was approved by Cabinet in November 2023. This provides the framework to deliver our net zero ambitions for the Council by 2030 and the County by 2050. The development of the Strategy was supported by a significant stakeholder engagement process, including a series of external panels with contributions from the public and private sector, community and business representation, alongside academic and expert contributions. Further analysis, understanding and commitment is required relating to the resourcing of the Strategy which will require external funding to be secured.
---	---	--

All Strategic Priorities:

- 1, A County with a thriving economy and places with the right jobs, skills, and infrastructure;**
- 2, A place where people can live their best lives, where communities and individuals are supported to live safely, healthily, happily, and independently;**
- 3, A place with sustainable futures, which means adapting to and mitigating climate change and meeting net zero commitments.**

7	Successful cyber-attack.	<p>Multiple technical mitigations are in place and support is also provided by a cyber resilience provider. Cyber related reporting has been enhanced to provide further information including risk factors within regular reports presented to Corporate Board.</p> <p>An Internal Audit of Cyber Security was undertaken and finalised in 2023/24 and provides a level of assurance with action ongoing to address outstanding points.</p>
---	--------------------------	--

Risks identified by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

The *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)* published its final Report in October 2022. The report makes a number of powerful recommendations, based on separate investigations. We note the full findings and will not be complacent in our work and our awareness raising. We continue to work on a multi-agency basis to respond to child exploitation. We have a multi-agency group, overseen by the Warwickshire Safeguarding Partnership to ensure practice remains up to date, in order to respond to the ever-changing issues around exploitation. This has included new pilot activity responding to sexual images and AI generated images working with Warwickshire Police. We also continue to participate in a range of events and partnership initiatives including Knife Angel to educate and raise awareness of violent behaviour and knife crime and Loudmouth theatre prevention workshops which have been attended by over 12,000 children and other targeted work. We are developing with Public Health a review of

interventions to measure the effectiveness of our current approaches and informed by the latest evidence. This ensures we are at the forefront of safeguarding practice and responses to violent crime involving young people and exploitation.

Recruitment and Retention

As with many organisations, we continue to experience challenges in recruitment and retention in particular roles, such as social workers, planners, finance staff and lawyers. Through Our People Strategy, we continue to develop ways to address this, and throughout 2023/2024, we saw our turnover rates continue to reduce to just above 11%, (a reduction from just below 13% in the previous year) which is within the targeted range. We also saw a further upturn on our engagement rates from 76% to 79%. We continue to review our approaches to ensure that we are able to recruit and retain the best talent.

Financial Sustainability

Since the start of 2022, the Council's finances have been dominated by fundamental financial uncertainties arising from significant inflationary pressures (labour, supplies and services), low levels of economic growth, rapidly rising demand for services and uncertainty over national policy reforms, all impacting across our largest service areas e.g. special educational needs and disabilities, adult social care, home to school transport and children's social care. Capital programmes continue to be impacted by inflationary pressures. Throughout 2023/24 we closely monitored the impact on our financial position and put in place short-term solutions to ensure our budget remains balanced whilst developing longer term mitigations that are being actively monitored and reported upon. We have developed a budget for 2024/25 and a five-year medium-term financial strategy through to 2028/29 that balances the material overspend and requires delivery of challenging savings and that demand-driven services work within their increased budget allocations at a time when demand is increasing at a much faster rate than the Council's resources. The situation, primarily driven by external factors, remains extremely challenging. In February 2024, we agreed that, given the estimated level of spend on special educational needs and disabilities, we could no longer afford to set aside further resources to offset the cumulative Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block overspend beyond 2024/25 and instead would be forced to use the statutory override from April 2025 and commit to implementing the options available to make good the accumulated deficit when the statutory override ceases which is currently due to be March 2026; the unsustainable national funding provision for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities represents the key risk to the Council's medium-term financial sustainability.

School Place Provision

Current housing growth trajectories across the County are expected to increase the long-term demand for school places as new families move into the County. This is a big challenge in ensuring sufficiency of school places faced by the Council. Developer contributions will continue to be sought to provide the new provision needed as a result of housing growth. However, the need to forward fund education infrastructure to meet increased demand together with competing demands to use Basic Need capital resources for education provision such as Early Years sufficiency, SEND provision, maintaining the condition of the school estate and the increase in the costs of construction will put significant pressure on the funding available to provide sufficient school places. Any funding gap which cannot be met by future developer contributions will require additional borrowing or mean less funding is available for investment in meeting the Council's wider investment ambitions. During 2023/24, there has been some capping of

school places within academies, where capacity has been withdrawn for subsequent year groups after the initial year of entry. The Council has utilised Fair Access as the legislative mechanism that it has available, and the last resort, to ensure children can receive a school place outside the normal year of entry.

6 Certification

We will continue to manage the risks detailed above and further enhance our governance arrangements over the coming year as set out in the Governance Action Plan at Appendix 1. We are satisfied that the risks we have identified are addressed in our Council Plan, Council Delivery Plan, Medium Term Financial Strategy and other key strategies. We are satisfied that the actions identified will address the improvements that were highlighted in our review of effectiveness. These are monitored and reported to Members and Corporate Board as part of the corporate performance management framework. We will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.



Councillor Izzi Seccombe OBE
Leader of the Council



Monica Fogarty
Chief Executive/Head of Paid Service

Appendix 1 – Governance Improvement Action Plans

Table 1: Governance Improvement Actions from 2023/24	Action Owner	Due By	Review of Activity
The Governance Team (Legal Services) will work with colleagues across the Council to consider and implement actions, endorsed by Corporate Board, arising from the governance stocktake against the Framework.	Director of Strategy Planning and Governance	March 2025	This activity will continue into 2024/25 as part of our business as usual activity and any specific actions will be added to this plan.
The Pension Fund will respond to the Scheme Advisory Board's Good Governance Review and the Pension Regulator's General Code of Practice as the requirements are issued.	Head of Investments, Audit & Risk	March 2025	The Scheme Advisory Board Good Governance Guidance has not been released at the time of writing. The Pensions Regulator General Code of Practice was published on 10 January 2024 and at the time of writing the Pension Fund is currently reviewing how its arrangements compare to the new guidance.
Targeted consideration of aspects of the Constitution and the Codes of Conduct is being undertaken and we anticipate recommendations will be presented to Council by the end of 2023.	Head of Legal & Governance	Closed	This action has been completed with a report on organisational changes and associated Constitutional amendments being considered by Council in September 2023. The Petitions Scheme was also refreshed this year with changes approved by the Council in December 2023. However, consideration of the Constitution and ensuring it is up to date and reflects operating arrangements is an ongoing process. Further changes are anticipated to take forward the Council's response to the new Procurement legislation below.
Response to the new Procurement legislation (expected autumn 2024) to be implemented across the Council including strengthening of procurement practice as appropriate.	Director of Strategy Planning and Governance & Director of Finance	February 2025	We are expecting secondary legislation to the Act to be laid to bring the wider regime into effect in early 2024 followed by a minimum of six months' notice before 'go live' which we anticipated would be October 2024, but this has since been delayed to February 2025. In preparation for the new regime an officer group has been created which is working on the anticipated changes and how they will impact on current practice. Detailed training has also been sourced from external experts. Once the secondary legislation is published updates will be needed to Contract Standing Orders and the Constitution will

Table 1: Governance Improvement Actions from 2023/24	Action Owner	Due By	Review of Activity
			be reviewed generally in terms of financial and other delegations to ensure legislative compliance.
An improvement plan for School Admissions processes and practices is being produced by Education Services for delivery by April 2024.	Head of Access to Education	Closed	A plan was created following the move of School Admissions to sit in the Education Service. The plan centred around six themes and the majority of the actions have been completed. This includes a greater level of resilience in the admissions systems and complaint volumes have reduced. Data supporting In Year applications has shown a significant improvement and first choice preferences for Secondary Offers is up on the previous year.
Review and refresh the Strategic Risk Management Framework.	Head of Investments, Audit & Risk	Closed	The refreshed Framework was agreed by Corporate Board in November 2023 and Cabinet in January 2024.
Reviewing the end-to-end approach to education capital programme procurement	Head of Property	Autumn 2024	<p>Over the last 12 months the Property, Education, Procurement, and legal teams have been working towards identifying simpler and cost-effective procurement strategies, a key aspect of the end-to-end work. The Initial focus has been two-fold:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • first to benchmark current cost, processes and identify routes to market looking at other LAs and their experiences whilst reviewing data with consultants. These findings are now being used in how we procure as individual projects or as batches of work; and • Secondly to define and develop Warwickshire Employers' Requirements (ERs) to support design development, simplify contractor engagement and reduce scope changes. A well-prepared Employers' Requirements document is fundamental to the success of a project as it assists the contractor to properly plan the execution of the project and price and procure the resources, accordingly, thus resulting in fewer disputes and cost efficiency.

Table 2: Governance Improvement Actions for 2024/25	Action Owner	Due By	Review of Activity
The two-yearly Governance Stocktake to be carried out in autumn 2024	Director of Strategy Planning and Governance	December 2024	Activity due in autumn 2024.
Develop an e-learning module with Legal and HR development colleagues for governance and decision making aimed at committee report writers.	Head of Legal & Governance	March 2025	Plans are in place for the development of the e-learning module.
A full inspection of WFRS has been undertaken by HMICFRS, which reported in September 2023. An action plan exists to take forward the associated actions.	Chief Fire Officer	September 2025	<p>WFRS was issued 41 Areas for Improvements, in the previous inspection report, this has now been reduced to 26 and includes discharging the Prevention and EDI Cause of Concern.</p> <p>An action plan is in place and progress is being made to address the points. We anticipate the remaining Cause of Concern being discharged in June 2024.</p>
Delivery of the SEND Delivering Better Value Programme.	Head of SEND & Inclusion	March 2025	Grant application has been approved by the Department of Education and programme governance is in place.
Ethical standards to be defined in adopting artificial intelligence in the delivery of Council services to supplement existing guidance to staff on artificial intelligence.	Director of Enabling Services	October 2024	Initial guidance on the appropriate use of generative AI has been issued to staff. Further work is required to establish a 'data ethics framework' and suitable governance so that the Council can ensure it is utilising new technologies and capabilities in appropriate ways. This will cover artificial intelligence but, more broadly, the responsible use of data across the organisation and with partners.
A review of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA).	Executive Director of Children and Young People	December 2024	A review of the arrangements has been proposed with the Safeguarding Executive considering a report setting out the scope of the review and initial proposals on 11th April 2024. The MASA is part of the Pathfinder programme and changes will be proposed and implemented by December 2024.