

Service Assurance Statement 2020/21 – Corporate Services

Overall Assessment

During the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, this has placed a significant challenge on council services not only to respond to the impact of the pandemic but to maintain core service delivery. Whilst responding to this challenge, it is important an adequate system of internal control is exercised including arrangements for the management of risk and ensuring key governance frameworks continue to operate effectively.

It is recognised that the system of internal control can only manage, not eliminate, risk and that it cannot guarantee that any system or process is free from defect and does not prevent or detect irregularities. This service assurance statement is therefore prepared to the best of my knowledge.

Based upon the undertakings of my services during the year my assessment on the adequacy of the internal control environment has been informed by:

- The performance management arrangements for my services;
- The risk management processes in place within my services;
- Other corporate management, monitoring and review processes; and
- Review work undertaken by any third party, for example, external audit, review agencies or other assurance providers.

I confirm that within my areas of responsibility I am not aware of any of the following:

- Any irregularities in accounting practices or systems of internal control.
- The override or non-compliance of any key internal controls in place.
- Any communications from regulatory agencies concerning non-compliance with, or deficiencies in, reporting practices.
- Any non-compliance issues regarding the application of rules and regulations such as the Council's financial procedure rules or contract procedure rules.
- Any plans or intentions that may affect the valuation or classification of Council property or equipment and liabilities e.g. change in use or significant damage to an asset.
- Any large debts, fines, claims or other potential financial obligations.
- Any pending or threatened litigation relating to any of my service activities.

	Head of Service
Job Title	Head of Corporate Services
Date	9 August 2021

2020/21 Service Assurance Statement		Responses			
		Yes	No	Partial	Provide comment, particularly on any responses of 'partial' or 'no'. Please feel free to add a comment on 'yes' responses to support the response.
1.Risk Management					
1.1	Whilst there is not a requirement to maintain an operational risk register I am satisfied there are arrangements in place to identify and mitigate risks where appropriate, for example in relation to any key projects.	x			All corporate led projects, particularly around our transformation programme, consider and evaluate risk. Regular meetings also take place with my operational managers to discuss work activities and flag any horizon issues.
1.2	Any significant risks identified have been escalated to corporate management team and if necessary included within the corporate risk register.	x			Key corporate risks such as cyber security, GDPR compliance are included in the corporate risk register. This register is reviewed regularly by management team.
2. Internal Control					
2.1	I am satisfied my service areas are kept up to date with updates and changes to relevant Council policies and procedures.	x			All services are also part of respective professional networks to keep abreast of external factors.
2.2	I am satisfied my services routinely monitor compliance with prescribed processes (Council policy, agreed procedures, statutory returns etc.)			x	This is part of business as usual practice. Despite the response to Covid any relevant statutory return have continued to be submitted. A number of HR policies have had to be developed or refined during the year to provide organisational support to our response. Internal audit have been unable to provide independent assurance during the year as a result of the team's redeployment.
2.3	I am satisfied my services fully understand and comply with all legislation that is relevant to our operations.	x			There is varied legislation across the service areas e.g. GDPR, complex council tax and business rates legislation, HR employment law, ICT security etc. I have not been made aware of any non-compliance issues. The bulk of the legislation is embedded and not new.
2.4	Communication and reporting channels exist to allow timely reporting of operational issues to the relevant body e.g. corporate management team. Including appropriate escalation of incidents.	x			I disseminate on a regular basis all pertinent information to operational managers and provide key corporate messages at all team meetings.
2.5	I am satisfied there has been no circumvention of any key internal controls during the year or the complete removal of any			x	In the early part of our response to the pandemic, not all my officers could approve orders and purchases. This required a member of the finance team to authorise on their behalf– an email trail exists to

	key controls.				support these requests.
3. Key Governance Framework					
3.1	I am satisfied my services fully understand and comply with their health and safety responsibilities.			x	All my services are represented on the internal 'keep healthy, stay safe' working group. Health and safety forms part of the annual PPD process and the council requires all staff to undertake a workstation assessment. A corporate overview of those assessments needs to be undertaken to ensure any staff concerns over their home set up are resolved. Health and safety is also a standing agenda item at team meetings.
3.2	I am satisfied my team comply with information management and security requirements, in particular, awareness and compliance to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).			x	GDPR compliance and awareness is led by the corporate team. A new consolidated corporate action plan has been developed and is being actioned. A key action within the plan is to gain assurance that retention schedules are actually being deployed in practice. Teams within my service remit have good awareness around reporting data breaches as evidenced by those reported during the year.
3.3	I am satisfied my services team are aware of and fulfil our responsibilities in respect of safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults.	x			The HR & OD Manager is the council's Deputy Safeguarding Officer. In terms of general safeguarding, this mainly relates to my forward facing services i.e. Revenues & Benefits and Customer Services. Both have good awareness of safeguarding arrangements and have made referrals when they feel necessary.
3.4	Any cases of fraud or whistleblowing allegations have been reported in accordance with relevant policies and remedial action taken where necessary.	x			No cases reported.
3.5	I am satisfied that any key projects are delivered in accordance with the council's project management framework.	x			All key corporate related projects follow the council's project management framework methodology and are monitored by the internal project programme board.
3.6	I am satisfied that all my service areas have awareness to and where necessary make declarations in respect of policies such as Code of Conduct, Gifts and Hospitality, other employment etc.	x			Declarations have been made during the course of the year.
4. Financial System and Controls					
4.1	I am satisfied there is adequate budgetary and financial controls in place across my service areas particularly around the monitoring of budgets and taking appropriate action when required.	x			Despite Covid, quarterly budget meetings have taken place for all service areas with the relevant finance lead officer. Monthly budget reports continue to be generated from the system to support this. Any variances have been justified during the year and reported to Executive Committee within the main financial outturn report.
4.2	In relation to the above all expenditure is legitimate and checked before authorisation – this includes expenditure types such as corporate procurement cards, travel and	x			Approval processes have remained in place during the year. Could be improved through formal electronic signature software.

	overtime/additional hours claims etc.				
4.3	I am not aware of any instances where the council's financial procedure rules or contract procedure rules have not been complied to.	x			None declared.
4.4	All recruitment has been undertaken in accordance with the council's recruitment procedures.	x			Additional posts have been required to support the response to the pandemic, particularly to backfill those staff from Revenues and Benefits re-deployed to the business cell, additional support to the ICT team, communications etc. These have been financed through a combination of reserves, covid recovery fund or new burdens funding. All have then be subject to approval from corporate management team.
4.5	Any grant schemes set up or grants received have been approved in accordance with the council's financial procedure rules.	x			Apart from the Covid-related business grant schemes (covered by the Head of Finance and Asset Management assurance statement) I am not aware of any new grant awards or income in my service areas.
5. Control over Assets					
5.1	I am satisfied my services are aware and compliant with procedures that ensure the protection of assets from loss, damage and misuse.	x			Main service area this impacts upon is ICT. All laptops are asset tagged and supported with an asset inventory.
5.2	I am satisfied my services review and report instances of loss, damage and misuse of assets and take appropriate management action where necessary.	x			See above – there have been a couple of instances where getting laptops back from contractors has proven problematic though.
5.3	I am satisfied that any disposal of assets have been approved in accordance with the council's financial procedure rules.	x			Redundant laptops were disposed of to a local charity. Approved by corporate leadership team.
6. Partnerships					
6.1	I am satisfied that any key partnerships which my services are part of have the necessary governance arrangements in place to ensure the effectiveness of that partnership.	x			Key partnerships such as DWP and the Gloucestershire Counter Fraud Unit are well established.
7. Any other issues to note (please give details)					
7.1	As reported during the year to Audit and Governance Committee, the internal audit team has been re-deployed to support the business cell for the whole of 2020/21. The recovery of the internal audit team has been identified as a significant governance issue within the AGS.		x		