

## **Annual Governance Statement**

### **1 Scope of responsibility**

- 1.1 West Berkshire Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. West Berkshire Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 1.2 In discharging this overall responsibility, West Berkshire Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs and facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.
- 1.3 West Berkshire Council has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government.
- 1.4 This statement explains how West Berkshire Council has complied with the code and also meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

### **2 The purpose of the governance framework**

- 2.1 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which West Berkshire Council is directed and controlled and its activities through which it engages with, leads and accounts to the community. It enables West Berkshire Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost effective services.
- 2.2 The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of West Berkshire Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.
- 2.3 The governance framework has been in place at West Berkshire Council for the year ended 31 March 2015 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and statement of accounts.

### **3 The governance framework**

- 3.1 The key elements of the systems and processes that comprise West Berkshire Council's governance arrangements are set out below and include arrangements for:
  - Identifying and communicating West Berkshire Council's Strategy that sets out its purpose and intended outcomes for citizens and service users;
  - Reviewing West Berkshire Council's Strategy and its implications for West Berkshire Council's governance arrangements;

- Measuring the quality of services for users, ensuring they are delivered in accordance with West Berkshire Council's Strategy and ensuring that they represent the best use of resources;
- Establishing clear channels of communication with all sections of the community and other stakeholders, ensuring accountability and encouraging open consultation;
- Consultation on the budget and any proposed budget reductions are planned in good time and adhere to the Council's own consultation policy. As part of any consultation on the budget the Council is cognisant of the "Gunning" principles which requires the Council to consult at the formative stage which would mean potential options being available for the residents to comment on. Clearly as the Council's budget reduces and the pressure on further reductions increases this approach becomes more difficult. However, where options are available the Council will seek the views of the residents. The Council will also continue to ensure that the requirements of an Equality Impact Assessment are met and ask our residents how a proposed reduction in service might impact on them and how they could help to mitigate the impact;
- Defining and documenting the roles and responsibilities of the executive, non-executive, scrutiny and officer functions, with clear delegation arrangements and protocols for effective communication;
- Developing, communicating and embedding codes of conduct, defining the standards of behaviour for members and staff;
- Reviewing and updating the Constitution including Contracts Rules of Procedure and Financial Rules of Procedure, The Scheme of Delegation, which clearly define how decisions are taken and the processes and controls required to manage risks;
- Ensuring the authority's financial management arrangements conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on "The Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010)";
- The Governance and Audit Committee which performs the core functions of an audit committee, as identified in CIPFA's "Audit Committees – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities";
- The Finance and Governance Group which helps to ensure compliance with relevant laws and regulations, internal policies and procedures, and that expenditure is lawful;
- Conducting a regular review of the effectiveness of Internal Audit;
- Whistle blowing procedures for receiving and investigating complaints from staff or the public;
- Identifying the development needs of Members and senior officers in relation to their strategic roles, supported by appropriate training;

#### **4 Review of effectiveness**

- 4.1 West Berkshire Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of all managers within West Berkshire Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment.
- 4.2 The following processes have been applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework, and includes:
- The work of the Finance and Governance Group reviewing the Constitution on annual basis and referring changes to the Governance and Audit Committee and Council;
  - The work of the Risk Management Group and the Risk Management framework;
  - The annual assurance statements produced by all Heads of Service;
  - The work of the Governance and Audit Committee;
  - The work of the Standards Committee;
  - The work of Internal Audit; and
  - The work of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission.
  - Responding positively to external regulators such as OFSTED, the Information Commissioner, the Local Government Ombudsman and external auditor KPMG.
  - Commissioning regular external peer reviews by the Local Government Association.
- 4.3 We have been advised of the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by the Governance and Audit committee and a plan to address weaknesses and ensure continuous improvement of the system is in place.

#### **5 Significant governance issues identified in the AGS for 2013/14**

- 5.1 The following is an outline of the significant governance issue that was identified in preparing the 2013/14 AGS.
- Recruitment and retention in Children's services - Instability in the workforce, which was compromising the quality of practice and the delivery of a safe and effective safeguarding service, led to a specific review of recruitment and retention in the service.
- 5.2 The following measures were implemented during 2014/15:
- The Council reviewed the recruitment and retention procedures and implemented a range of measures to improve the terms and conditions of child and family social workers in four core social work teams, to make the working environment more conducive to good social work practice for all our social workers, to implement a social work academy and to improve our recruitment processes so that we didn't lose suitable applicants during the process.

## **6 Significant Governance Issues identified in 2014/15**

6.1 The following is an outline of the significant governance issues identified in 2014/15.

- Children Services, OFSTED review – the practice issues identified in children and family services in 2014/15 and addressed through the implementation of the recruitment and retention package and related measures had not been sufficiently improved by the time OFSTED inspected the service in March 2015. As a result the service was judged to be inadequate for “help and protection” and therefore inadequate for “overall effectiveness”. As a consequence of this judgement the Department of Education is considering issuing the Council with an “Improvement Notice”. The form this will take, and whether an Improvement Board will be required, is currently under discussion between the Council and the DfE.
  
- Resourcing service delivery – The Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy highlights a funding gap of very significant proportions that may impact on the Council’s ability to deliver the outcomes set out in the Council Strategy. Key unfunded pressures include:
  1. Care Act funding, presently subject of a Judicial Review taken by the Council against the Department of Health
  2. Moving the Childrens Service from an “inadequate” to a “good” rating, as set out in the Council Strategy
  3. Placement costs for Childrens Services
  4. John O Gaunt School funding gap
  5. Volatility around the business rate retention.
  6. The budget, planned for July and subsequent “Spending Review” may result in further grant cuts, greater than allowed for in current plans.

6.2 The following measures will be implemented during 2015/16:

- Children Services, OFSTED review - The Council will implement the Improvement Plan that is prepared in response to the OFSTED inspection judgement. This plan is to be submitted to the Department for Education no later than 24 August 2015
- Resourcing – Implement a savings programme that will ensure the Council is able to set a balanced budget for 2016-17

Signed:

Nick Carter – Chief Executive

Gordon Lundie – Leader of the Council