

Annual Governance Statement 2019/2020

Blackpool Council



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Acknowledgement of Responsibility

Blackpool Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards. It needs to ensure that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

The Accounts and Audit Regulations (2015) require the Council to conduct a review, at least once a year, on the effectiveness of its system of internal control and include an Annual Governance Statement reporting on the review with the Statement of Accounts.

The Principles of Good Governance

The CIPFA Delivering Good Governance publication (2016) defines the various principles of good governance in the public sector and how they relate to each other and are defined as:

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

The governance framework at Blackpool Council comprises the systems and processes, culture and values which the Council has adopted in order to deliver on the above principles. The system of internal control is a significant part of the framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.

The governance framework incorporated into this report has been in place at Blackpool Council for the year ended 31st March 2020 and up to the date of the approval for the statement of accounts for that year.

Key Challenges

This section sets out key challenges faced by the Council in the year which have impacted on the governance arrangements in place.

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Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

In March 2020 the Council, like the rest of the world, was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Council's governance processes were reviewed during the Covid-19 crisis and a number of temporary changes to these processes were made to address the urgent requirements of the situation. An urgent Council Executive meeting was held on 23rd March 2020 which agreed that a major incident should be declared for the Council in relation to Covid-19. The Council Executive meeting agreed to a temporary delegation of powers to the Council Chief Executive, or in his absence the Council's Director of Resources, on issues caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and to protect citizens in relation to public safety.

All Council services pulled together further embedding a culture of cross-departmental working in order to respond effectively to the pandemic and continue to support the residents and businesses across the town.

In response to Covid-19, the Council invoked its established Business Continuity Management Framework. The Corporate Business Continuity Plan includes the Council's critical activities list, incorporating statutory responsibilities and recovery timescales. The critical activities list was used to assess essential Council resource requirements during Covid-19. The Corporate Leadership Team determined the emergency response impact on service delivery and necessary service prioritisation.

The Corporate Leadership Team met on a daily basis to discuss the critical activities list and ensure that resources were appropriately deployed to those services which could not fail. The Senior Leadership Team met virtually each week so that important information about the pandemic and the Council's response could be shared. Each week the Chief Executive and his management team also briefed the political Group Leaders and both MPs on the decisions taken and those to be taken each week.

The decisions taken during the initial stages of the pandemic were logged on the Council's Incident Decision Log and an oversight was maintained to ensure appropriate decision making protocols were followed that risks were managed throughout.

The Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic was and continues to be co-ordinated with partners through the Lancashire Resilience Forum. This includes co-ordination with all the local authorities across Lancashire and with statutory agencies including Lancashire Constabulary, Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service and North West Ambulance Service.

The Council took on new responsibilities due to Covid-19 in relation to paying urgent grants to small businesses and has provided support to local businesses to help them to access the grants that they are entitled to.

Extensive targeted support to the community was provided through establishing Community Hubs and working with voluntary sector agencies in the provision of a range of services such as befriending services for residents in isolation were implemented.

The Council has proactively engaged with residents during the pandemic using a range of channels including social media and it will continue to build on this engagement throughout the rest of the pandemic and going forward. The Council will also continue with its Channel Change agenda to build on these connections with residents, partnerships and businesses to provide support during the recovery phase of the pandemic.

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As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, a monthly recovery report is being produced for Corporate Leadership Team providing information on the impact of the pandemic on the residents of Blackpool as well as the economy of the town and this helps inform decisions which the Council make around recovery from the pandemic.

The disruption caused by the pandemic has prompted a mini-review of the Council Plan to ensure that unavoidable disruption to the timescales of major projects is reflected, and additional work needed to address the ongoing issues caused is captured

The impact on the Council's finances due to Covid-19 has been identified and planning for the financial implications continues. The financial reporting requirements have been altered due to Covid-19. The final accounts reporting deadline was changed to the 30th November and the Audit Committee timetable changed to accommodate this by enabling reporting to the Committee at the appropriate time.

The Council quickly adapted to new ways of working and controls were established relating to many Council staff working from home due to Covid-19 including the introduction of a new Virtual Private Network to enable an increased number of staff to securely access the Council's network from home. Likewise, the use of Zoom was introduced early to enable the broadcast of public accessible meetings.

Significant work has been undertaken to ensure that the Council is a Covid Secure workplace to enable those staff who need to be in work to undertake their roles safely. This continues to be reviewed in light of changes to Government Guidance. Procedures were established to address the Human Resource implications of the Covid-19 situation. A detailed employee support offer and sources of advice for staff was implemented. Staff communications and changes to the use of staff resources have been addressed through employee frequently asked questions published on the Hub. More proactive publicity of staff compliments is helping to increase morale in services that have been struggling due to the pressures of the pandemic.

Climate Emergency

At its meeting of 26th June 2019, the Council passed a motion proposed by the Council Leader to declare a Climate Emergency. The primary commitments made are to make the Council's activities net-zero carbon by 2030 and achieve 100% clean energy across the Council's full range of functions by the same date.

The declaration also covers leadership to achieve a reduction in emissions across the town generally, engagement with the public and stakeholders, effecting a culture change across our organisation, wholly-owned companies, staff and partners and taking a role to exert wider influence beyond Blackpool on this issue.

A steering group has been established to lead this issue internally, which includes representation from the Council's wholly-owned companies and an initial action plan is in place. A Citizen's Assembly will be held in the autumn for the public to deliberate on the issues. Along with work to identify a carbon reduction roadmap, together these pieces of work will result in the development of a longer-term action plan.

Exit from the European Union

The Council has been working to prepare for EU Exit which is being overseen by a working group of officers from across the council, working in conjunction with the Lancashire Resilience Forum (LRF). The Council has continued to engage on EU Exit related matters through a number of regional and national forums including working with the Local Government Association (LGA) and various Whitehall departments.

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The Governance Framework

The key elements of the structures and processes that comprise Blackpool Council's governance arrangements are summarised below.

Code of Conduct and Behaviours

Codes of Conduct are in place that define standards of behaviours for elected members and officers. Adherence to these is a key part of good governance. These are further supported by the Council's Whistleblowing Policy, Registers of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality Policies. Processes are in place to deal with non-compliance through the Council's Disciplinary Policy for Officers and the Monitoring Officer and/or Standards complaints procedure for Elected Members.

A Leadership Charter is in place which aims to bring to life the vision for the Council's workforce as outlined in the Workforce Strategy 2016-2020 and it has been embedded with the Individual Performance Appraisal Process (IPA).

Key Supporting Policies and Procedures	
Code of Conduct for Members	https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/The-Council/Documents/Part5aCodeofConductforMembers.pdf
Officer Code of Conduct	https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/The-Council/Documents/Part5bOfficerCodeofConduct.pdf
Whistleblowing Policy	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/s53154/Appendix%203a%20-%20Whistleblowing%20Procedure.pdf
Registers of Members' Interests	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?FN=ALPHA&VW=LIST&PIC=0

Organisational Culture

The Council's organisational culture is driven by the Corporate Leadership Team and Executive and a set of values have been defined, previously agreed by Council which all employees and elected members are expected to adhere to and these include:

- We are **accountable** for delivering on the promises we make and take responsibility for our actions and the outcomes achieved
- We are committed to being **fair** to people and treat everybody we meet with dignity and respect
- We take pride in delivering **quality** services that are community focussed and are based on listening carefully to what people need
- We act with integrity and we are **trustworthy** in all our dealings with people and we are open about the decisions we make and the services we offer
- We are **compassionate**, caring, hard-working and committed to delivering the best services that we can with a positive and collaborative attitude.

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Closely linked to our values is our approach to fulfilling our legal obligations on equalities. We understand that fairness means making reasonable adjustments for people and groups so they can get access to services and support. Our approach to this is set out in our equality goals, which are reviewed every 4 years.

All new Council plans and strategies are reviewed to make sure they are tailored to the needs of groups with protected characteristics. Going beyond this, in the course of our work we also consider how to contribute to eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation; how to advance quality of opportunity and how we can help different groups of people get along together.

Our equality objectives aim to get more people to tell us they experience fair treatment by Council services; to make our workforce representative of our communities, with more people from diverse backgrounds involved in decision making at every level; that equality and diversity is embedded in staff culture; and that we celebrate growing diversity and increase respect and understanding for all.

Children's services are embedding a new culture across Blackpool 'Blackpool Families Rock'. Our commitment is to work with families not 'do things to them' with the child at the heart of everything that we do and to work with families at the lowest possible level to prevent their needs from escalating to a higher level.

To deliver its ambitions the Council needs to be efficient and resilient. An entrepreneurial culture has been developed across the Council and continues to be embedded in order to develop different ways of working and maximising our chances of achieving our outcomes. Examples of this include our Wholly-Owned Companies, bidding for funding, working in partnership, the business loans fund and making savings whilst transforming our services.

Key Supporting Policies and Procedures	
Senior Employees	https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Transparency-and-open-data/Pay-policy-and-salaries/Senior-employees.aspx#Directorofresources
Workforce Diversity Report	https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Transparency-and-open-data/Equalities-and-diversity/Workforce-diversity-report.aspx
Council strategies, policies and plans	https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/The-Council/Council-constitution-and-plans/Council-strategies-policies-and-plans.aspx
Working Well with Children and Families in Lancashire	https://www.blackpoolsafeguarding.org.uk/for-professionals/early-help-and-thresholds-for-intervention
Blackpool Neglect Strategy	https://www.blackpoolsafeguarding.org.uk/neglect

Commitment to Openness, Communication and Consultation

The Council complies with the requirements of the Transparency Agenda and provides a range of information in the public domain through its website.

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The Council adopts a priority campaign planning approach using a variety of different marketing communications channels. Key messages are also communicated to residents in the 'Your Blackpool' publication which is delivered to all Blackpool households on a quarterly basis. The Council has enhanced its use of social media and has started to move towards greater use of these platforms as part of a strategic approach to communications.

The Council continue to increase the direct communication and engagement with local businesses so that they have a detailed understanding of the benefits of the regeneration work that the Council is undertaking. This is being done via the Council's own communication channels as well as utilising partner organisations including StayBlackpool, VisitBlackpool, the Town Centre BID and the Blackpool Business Leadership Group.

The public are able to attend and speak at Committee and Full Council meetings and this has continued virtually given the social distancing requirements.

The Council has in place a system to respond to Freedom of Information requests and compliance with the timelines is managed by the Information Governance Team and reported through to the Corporate Leadership Team.

Consultation and engagement with the public takes place by the lead service area, which can access the Council's in-house cost recovery research team Infusion Research, for wider ranging or more complex consultation exercises.

The Council last undertook a resident's survey in 2018 and is due to undertake one in 2020. However, the impact of the pandemic has meant that the slot for the survey in May could not be used. It is important to ensure the data is comparable and this would normally mean that the survey should be undertaken at the same time of the year. A decision is pending on whether to run the survey in the autumn, or postpone for a full year until May 2021.

Structures are in place to ensure consultation with other public and voluntary sector agencies through the Fairness Commission and also local businesses through the Blackpool Business Leadership Group.

Key Supporting Policies and Procedures	
Council Agendas and Minutes	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1
Online Council meetings	https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Council-meetings/Webcast.aspx
Open Government Licence	https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Transparency-and-open-data/Open-Government-Licence.aspx
Transparency and Open Data	https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Transparency-and-open-data/Transparency-and-open-data.aspx
Freedom of Information	https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Transparency-and-open-data/Freedom-of-information/Freedom-of-information.aspx

Developing, Communicating and Translating the Vision

A thorough review of the Council Plan was undertaken in 2018 to ensure it continues to address the key issues facing the town. As a result, the Council Plan 2019-2024 sets out the vision for Blackpool to continue to be 'The

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UK's number one family resort with a thriving economy that supports a happy and healthy community who are proud of this unique town'. The two priorities remain the same as the previous iteration of the plan:

- The Economy: Maximising Growth and Opportunity across Blackpool.
- Communities: Creating Stronger Communities and Increasing Resilience.

Beneath each priority the plan details the key challenges faced by Blackpool and the key projects and schemes which will be implemented to address these issues. The Council Plan seeks to address the big issues and policy drivers facing local government. The concept of organisational resilience – ensuring that the organisation is capable of delivering the priorities, meeting its legal requirements, and maintaining sustainability into the future - is captured throughout the plan, with the detail included in the Council's wider policy framework.

The Council has a key role in working with partner organisations in order to translate the vision for Blackpool into deliverable actions. This has been particularly demonstrated through the core coordination role that the Council took on board in response to the pandemic from March 2020 to ensure that the local community was effectively supported by a wide range of organisations.

As in previous years, the Council held a staff conference in 2019 hosted by the Chief Executive, with breakout sessions focussing on aspects of the Council's work across its directorates. These covered topics relevant to the plan, helping to encourage staff understanding of the direction taken by the Council and its Wholly Owned Companies.

The Council priorities feed into directorate business plans and are a key tool for managers to use when developing business plans. The business plans then feed into Individual Performance Appraisals (IPA). The 2020/21 process will be different in that services will work towards recovery plans instead of business plans.

Key Supporting Policies and Procedures

Council Plan 2019 to 2024

<https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Creating-a-better-Blackpool/Blackpool-Council-plan/Council-plan-2019-to-2024.aspx>

Performance Management

A Policy Framework is in place which sets out the corporate strategies and plans which are in place. Corporate resource is available to support services on the development of strategies, shaping them in line with corporate objectives.

The Council's performance management system is now well established, with strategic performance reported to Corporate Leadership Team, members of the Cabinet and the Scrutiny Leadership Board, whilst local performance indicators are managed through the business planning process. The suite of Council Plan headline KPIs will be reviewed so that some of the measures around post-COVID recovery can be incorporated into ongoing performance reporting. This review will also look to incorporate KPIs for a new corporate priority around organisational resilience, as recommended in the Corporate Governance Peer Review which took place in March 2020.

In March 2019, the Secretary of State appointed a DfE Commissioner for Children's Services in Blackpool, following an inadequate judgement by Ofsted of the Council's Children's Services from its inspection in November 2018. One

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of the recommendations of the Commissioner was to establish a strategic and overarching Children and Families Partnership. This Partnership Board was established in January 2020 and meets quarterly. It is chaired by the Chief Executive and has an emerging set of principles and priorities around inclusion, literacy and the social impact of poverty. The Children's Improvement Board has been replaced by the Getting to Good Board; this partnership meets bi-monthly, monitoring progress and driving improvement in performance and practice in children's social care.

Following the HMIP inspection of youth offending services in October 2018, Blackpool's Youth Offending Partnership developed an improvement plan to address the recommendations from the inspection. The actions from this improvement plan were delivered throughout 2019/20. In February 2020, a peer review was conducted by the Youth Justice Sector Improvement Partnership, the outcome of which has informed the development of a new strategic improvement plan for 2020/21. The partnership is currently awaiting confirmation of the arrangements for the next inspection by HMIP. Alongside this, the partnership undertook a self-assessment against the new national standards for youth justice services (as required by the Youth Justice Board) which has led to the development of action plans for each of the national standards themes. Senior officers from across the partnership have been assigned as theme leads to drive delivery of these action plans. The delivery of the improvement plan and theme action plans is supported by a robust performance and quality assurance framework to ensure that improvements in performance and practice are embedded within services.

In order to improve performance the Council participates in peer reviews and benchmarking exercises to learn from others and to ensure that services delivered are value for money. The LGA undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge exercise for the Council in March 2020, as part of its work to strengthen the local government sector. The challenge focussed on the Council's understanding of the local context to set an appropriate vision and priorities, provision of effective leadership of external stakeholders, financial planning and viability, organisational leadership and governance, and capacity to deliver. Reflecting on our last Peer Challenge in 2014, the Council developed a position statement outlining our strengths and challenges and hosted the LGA's team for a week of interviews and focus groups. The final feedback has been delayed due to the team comprising of senior officers and members at the forefront of responding to the pandemic.

The Libraries service invited an LGA team in for a similar process as part of the development of their Libraries Ambition Plan in June 2019. Commenting positively on the extensive research underpinning the plan, they judged the Plan to be achievable, and advised on ways of further strengthening the likelihood of the plan being implemented effectively. This fed into the ultimate approval of the Plan by the executive in June 2020. The process of internal and external consultation / review and scrutiny of this plan prior to approval is an example of good practice and a model which other services wishing to significantly transform will be encouraged to adopt going forward.

The Individual Performance Appraisal process which is in place is part of the Council's wider approach to performance management. The IPA process is an important tool designed to provide an opportunity to establish and understand expectations and to evaluate performance in order to help employees develop to their full potential. The IPA process is not a replacement for day to day people management so in addition employees are supported by their line managers and should be mentored, coached and directed according to their individual needs. This may come through regular one to one meetings, formal supervision meetings, team meetings and informal feedback. The Leadership Charter supports the Council's priorities and values and is included in the

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Manager’s IPA template. The Council has undertaken two Leadership surveys to benchmark performance and progress against the new Charter and this has evidenced that from a good baseline there has been further improvement. Going forward the plan is to undertake the survey every two years.

Key Supporting Policies and Procedures		
Policy Framework		https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/The-Council/Documents/Part8StragtegiPlanningProcess.pdf
Children’s Service Inspection	Ofsted	https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Residents/Health-and-social-care/Children-and-families/Childrens-social-care/Childrens-services-Ofsted-inspection.aspx
Libraries Ambition Plan 2020-2024		http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/s54470/Appendix%205d%20Libraries%20Ambition%20Plan%20overview%20version%20June%202020.pdf

Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibilities and functions are in place for each Council Committee including Licensing, Planning, Standards, Scrutiny Committees and the Audit Committee. These are reviewed annually with any changes made at the Council’s Annual Meeting to ensure that they continue to be fit for purpose. The Executive has agreed a set of criteria relating to the levels of decision making within the Executive Framework which provide clarity and consistency for decision makers.

All Council Officers, including the Corporate Leadership Team, have a job description which set out their roles and responsibilities. Annually, through the Individual Performance Appraisal process individual objectives are set for each officer which align with their job description and the Business Plan for the Service in which they work.

The Corporate Leadership Team has been extended once a month to involve key Heads of Service in the decision making process. Steps continue to be taken to address some of the concerns with ‘hard to recruit to posts’ such as the development of the Next Step Blackpool website to recruit Children’s Social Workers and Teachers to the area. In addition, there is ongoing investment in digital technologies to help improve capacity across the Council.

The Council’s Constitution, including the Scheme of Delegation, sets out the arrangements and protocols which are in place to enable effective decision making within the authority.

The Council has in place effective arrangements to discharge the Head of Paid Service function and this role is undertaken by the Chief Executive.

The Council has designated a Monitoring Officer and Deputy with appropriate qualifications and experience. The Monitoring Officer has the specific duty to ensure that the Council, its officers and its Elected Members maintain the highest standards in all they do and is responsible to the Council for ensuring that governance procedures are followed and all applicable statutes and regulations are complied with.

Key Supporting Policies and Procedures

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Responsibilities for Functions	https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/The-Council/Council-constitution-and-plans/Part-3-Responsibility-for-functions.aspx
Responsibilities for Functions - Officers	https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/The-Council/Council-constitution-and-plans/Part-3-Responsibility-for-functions.aspx#Section9Officers

Decision Making

The Constitution sets out the functions and responsibilities of the Council, the Executive and Committees. Included in this are the delegation arrangements adopted by the Council and the Executive and this is reviewed on a regular basis.

All Executive decisions contain all relevant policy implications including financial, risk management, human resources, equality analysis, ethical considerations, legal considerations and links to Council priorities. All Executive decisions are subject to finance and legal approval before they are taken forward for a decision to be made. The Monitoring Officer or a designated representative, receives all decisions before they are processed and therefore is able to check the robustness of data quality prior to a decision being submitted for formal approval.

Cabinet Member and relevant Officer Decisions are published to meet transparency requirements and inform the public.

A framework for undertaking compliance checks to ensure that decision making processes are appropriate has been developed and these reviews are jointly carried out by Internal Audit and Democratic Governance and the findings reported to Audit Committee.

Key Supporting Policies and Procedures	
Agendas and Minutes	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1
Executive and Cabinet Member Decisions	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/mgDelegatedDecisions.aspx?bcr=1

Compliance with relevant Laws, Regulations, Internal Policies and Procedures

A wide range of corporate policies and procedures are in place to ensure compliance with laws and regulations. These cover all key areas including financial management, human resources, procurement, contract management, risk management, business continuity, data protection, health and safety management arrangements and safeguarding arrangements.

Internal and external audit arrangements are in place to provide a reasonable level of assurance on compliance with the Council's system of internal control.

The Council has obtained PSNN, PCI and N3 security compliance so that it can effectively share data with other organisations including the National Health Service and Department for Work and Pensions. There is an ongoing

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review of cyber risks and progress against this is monitored by the Audit Committee. An ICT Security Policy is in place.

An Information Governance Team is in place the Head of Service whom carries out the function of the Statutory Data Protection Officer and works with Council services to ensure that personal information is appropriately safeguarded in line with GDPR.

A Corporate Procurement and Projects Team is in place to support Heads of Services and Service Managers to undertake market engagement for those goods, services and works which are delivered through third-party organisations. Procedures are in place to ensure compliance with the Public Contract Regulations Act 2015, European Union Procurement Directive 2014 and the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. Standard Control Documents are used to ensure consistency of practice, demonstrate value for money and to maximise social value through tendering and contract arrangements.

Mandatory training is delivered in a number of ways including a mandatory training pack for non IT users and through the iPool online system for IT users. This ensures casual, temporary and permanent employees are aware of legislative requirements. Reporting tools have been developed to enable Managers to monitor completion of mandatory training courses and completion of Individual Performance Appraisals in real time.

The Council's Monitoring Officer has a role in ensuring that the Council acts within the remit of relevant law and regulations and that a robust democratic process ensures the application of the Constitution. The Monitoring Officer is responsible for the in-house legal team which serves as an additional control to ensure that the Council operates within the constraints of the law and the team hold LEXCEL accreditation.

A number of arrangements are in place to deal with potential breaches to compliance and these include a Corporate Complaints Panel and Serious Case Reviews. These are chaired independently of the service which has breached requirements to ensure that objective decisions can be taken.

A Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Panel is in place which reviews any positive DBS's in relation to pre-employment checks to ensure Council wide robust and consistent decision making.

A Health and Safety Team is in place which provide advice, support and guidance to managers across the Council regarding compliance with health and safety legislation. The team is responsible for issuing the Corporate Arrangements which all employees should adhere too. The Health and Safety Team also undertake a programme of audits to ensure that managers maintain their manuals and comply with statutory requirements.

Key Supporting Policies and Procedures

Corporate Customer Feedback Policy	https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Documents/Corporate-Customer-Feedback-Policy-0819-FINAL-VERSION-V1.1.pdf
Data Protection and GDPR	https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Transparency-and-open-data/Data-protection/Data-protection.aspx

Financial Management

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The Council has an appropriately qualified and experienced designated Chief Finance Officer who holds Section 151 responsibilities and a deputy has also been appointed. The Chief Finance Officer has arrangements in place for financial management, financial reporting and value for money which is assessed annually by the Council's external auditors.

Financial Regulations are in place which are supported by a Scheme of Delegation to ensure that managers are aware of the level of expenditure they are able to authorise.

The Council sets a lawful annual budget and is part way through a six-year Medium Term Financial Sustainability Strategy which runs to the end of the 2021/22 financial year. The associated plan is updated on an annual basis to enable early planning on the financial position to take place.

Monthly financial monitoring reports, starting from month 0, are reported to the Corporate Leadership Team, the Executive and Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee.

The Council's financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Finance Officer in Local Government (2016).

The Council facilitates a Public Inspection of the Accounts and publishes details of all payment transactions over and above the minimum requirements of the Transparency Code.

Key Supporting Policies and Procedures	
Statutory Chief Finance Officer (holding Section 151 responsibilities)	https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Transparency-and-open-data/Pay-policy-and-salaries/Senior-employees.aspx#Directorofresources
Medium Term Financial Sustainability Strategy	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/s16485/Medium%20Term%20Financial%20Sustainability%20Plan.pdf
Corporate Scheme of Delegation	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/s56834/Appendix%20A%20Corporate%20Scheme%20of%20Delegation%201920.pdf
Financial Procedure Rules	https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/The-Council/Documents/Part4fFinancialProcedureRules.pdf

Audit Arrangements

An Audit Committee is in place which is independent of the scrutiny function. As a full committee of the Council it is able to discharge all the core functions of an Audit Committee outlined in the CIPFA Audit Committee: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities (2018), from which the Committee has adopted the model terms of reference. Over the past twelve months the Chair of the Audit Committee has continued to raise the profile of the Audit Committee and has presented a report to Full Council on the work of the Committee and has proactively requested Chief Officers and Head of Services to attend Committee to be challenged and held to account where controls issues have been identified. An independent member position has co-opted onto the Committee to enhance the robustness of the Committee.

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Modular training is delivered prior to each Audit Committee meeting to ensure that members have the appropriate skills and knowledge to effectively discharge their duties.

The Council has an internal audit team who prepare an Annual Internal Audit Plan which is approved by the Corporate Leadership Team and the Audit Committee. This includes a balance of risk and compliance work. The audit opinion and assurance statement for each audit is reported quarterly to the Audit Committee.

In 2019/20 the Head of Audit and Risk provided an Annual Audit Opinion that sufficient assurance work was undertaken to provide a reasonable conclusion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the control environment and that the overall control environment at the Council is adequate, with the exception of Children's Services where significant risks have been identified by Ofsted. Where weaknesses were identified through internal audit work the team have worked with management to agree appropriate remedial actions and a timescale for improvement.

The Council's internal audit arrangements conform to the governance requirements the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. An external review of the Council's compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards took place in 2016/17 which confirmed conformance with the standards. The recommendations made in the external assessment report have been incorporated into the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme for the service.

External audit arrangements are in place and representatives are invited to attend Audit Committee to present the findings of their work and raise any concerns which they may have.

Key Supporting Policies and Procedures	
Internal Audit Charter 2019/20	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/s43524/APPENDIX%208A%20Internal%20Audit%20Charter%202019-20.pdf
Internal Audit Plan 2019/20	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/s43520/APPENDIX%206A%20Internal%20Audit%20Annual%20Plan%202019-20.pdf
Annual Audit Opinion 2019/20	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/s54723/Appendix%205a%20-%20Annual%20Report%20and%20Opinion%20-%202019-20.pdf
Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme 2019/20	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/s45883/Appendix%209a%20-%20Quality%20Assurance%20Improvement%20Programme%20-%202019-20.pdf

Risk Management

A Corporate Risk Management Group is in place to coordinate and promote risk management activity in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework 2018-2021. It is supported by directorate and thematic risk management groups.

All directorates have nominated risk champions to promote best practice in their areas and ensure that service level risk registers are in place and that risk registers are developed for major projects and partnerships where appropriate.

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The Strategic Risk Register is reviewed by the Corporate Leadership Team and considered by the Audit Committee annually. Chief Officers identified in the Strategic Risk Register are required to attend Audit Committee to explain how the risks are being managed and what further mitigating controls may be required.

Risk management should be considered for all decisions made by the Council and these are evidenced in the dedicated section on the decision making template.

A Corporate Business Continuity Plan and Critical Activities List are in place and this is supported by service level business continuity plans.

Key Supporting Policies and Procedures	
Risk Management Framework 2018/21	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/s29494/Appendix%206a%20Risk%20Management%20Framework%202018%20-2021.pdf
Strategic Risk Register 2019/20	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/s45885/Appendix%208a%20Strategic%20Risk%20Register%202019-2020.pdf
Business Continuity Framework 2018/21	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/g4292/Public%20reports%20pack%2016th-Nov-2017%2018.00%20Audit%20Committee.pdf?T=10

Counter Fraud and Anti-Corruption Arrangements

The Council has developed counter fraud and anti-corruption arrangements in line with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption. A Fraud Prevention Charter has been developed and approved by the Corporate Leadership Team and the Audit Committee. Any suspected instance of fraud or corruption should be reported to the Head of Audit and Risk so that an appropriate investigation into the matter can be undertaken.

A dedicated Corporate Fraud Team is in place which deals with a range of corporate fraud issues and proactive work has commenced on high risk areas such as insurance fraud, blue badges and council tax.

The Council has appropriate procedures in place to deal with the risk of money laundering and also to raise awareness of the Bribery Act and ensure that appropriate controls are in place to reduce the risk. An Anti-Money Laundering Policy is in place and this is supported by an iPool training course for employees to complete.

The Council participates in the National Fraud Initiative and progress against this and outcomes, are reported to Audit Committee on quarterly basis.

A corporate group is in place to review the Council's use of covert surveillance and to ensure compliance with the Regulatory of Investigatory Powers Act (2000).

Key Supporting Policies and Procedures	
Fraud Prevention Charter 2019/20	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/s43522/APPENDIX%207A%20%20Fraud%20Prevention%20Charter%202019-20.pdf

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Anti-Money Laundering Policy	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/s40222/APPENDIX%205a%20Anti-Money%20Laundering%20Policy%20and%20Procedure%20-%20October%202018.pdf
Covert Surveillance Policy	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/s49747/Appendix%206a%20DRAFT%20RIPA%20POLICY%20UPDATE.pdf

Scrutiny Arrangements

Three Scrutiny Committees are in place which reflect the Council's priorities namely a Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee, Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee and an Adults Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee. In May 2019, a Scrutiny Leadership Board was also introduced consisting of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the three committees and the Chair of the Audit Committee. This Board coordinates the work of the committees and manages the overall scrutiny work programme. There are also regular meetings with Senior Executive Members.

These committees help empower elected members and provide them with the opportunity to contribute to policy making, hold in-depth reviews and challenge and hold decision makers to account. These Committees meet on a regular basis and the minutes of the meetings and supporting documentation are published.

Elected member feedback on the revised scrutiny process has been positive and they consider this now enables a more balanced approach to scrutiny across all political parties.

Key Supporting Policies and Procedures	
Scrutiny Committee Agendas and Minutes	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1

Learning and Development

An Induction and Probation process is in place for all new employees in the Council. Following successful completion of the probation process employees will then receive a mandatory Individual Performance Appraisal (IPA). The IPA incorporates an annual and interim review, held at an appropriate time in a private, comfortable space and can be considered as the setting of a 'roadmap' for an employee for the coming twelve months.

A wide range of training is available corporately which is informed from Corporate Leadership team, Senior Leadership team, various workforce groups and the development needs identified in the Individual Performance Appraisals. The Council is committed to leadership development and various courses are available to continue to develop skills and knowledge. An aspiring leadership programme has been delivered but further work is required in relation to succession planning and this will form part of HRs Business Plan for 2020/21. The attainment of professional qualifications in relevant disciplines is encouraged and the Council is committed to funding studies where appropriate utilising the Apprenticeship Levy.

Many professionals across the Council maintain continuing professional develop records to ensure they continue to meet the requirements of their professional bodies.

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A Workforce Strategy is in place and steps have been taken through the new Business Planning Framework to better align workforce planning with the business plan process.

The Council encourage and promotes Apprenticeships to existing employees and through recruitment. The costs of training are funded through the Council's Apprenticeship Levy.

Project Search, the job scheme for young people with learning disabilities also ran for a third year where each of the students learn personal and job skills for a two month period before embarking on work placements to find a suitable job for them.

An induction programme is in place for all elected members. A three year development plan is in place for elected members which helps deliver training to help them fulfil their role. Elected members can have a personal development plan which helps to identify training needs.

The Council takes the Health and Wellbeing of employees very seriously and there is a comprehensive suite of support available in addition to an in house Occupational Health Service. This is promoted to employees via regular newsletters and a 'My Wellbeing' section on the Council's Hub.

Key Supporting Policies and Procedures

Workforce Strategy 2016-2020

<http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/s11071/Appendix%203a%20Workforce%20Strategy.pdf>

Partnerships and Joint Working

The Council is involved in a number of key projects with partner organisations in order to transform the way in which services are delivered. Examples include Better Start and HeadStart which focus on early intervention in order to build resilience in the community. Boards with representation from partner organisations are also in place for key risks faced by the Council to introduce an element of independence and challenge. Transformation is also been achieved through the Opportunity Area funding stream which seeks to improve educational attainment.

The Council is invited to attend the VCFSE Leaders meetings and aims to work alongside and in partnership with our third sector colleagues. This includes work around community engagement, community development and working together to ensure a more resilient Blackpool. This includes involving third sector representatives on key boards such as the town deal and working together on projects including a Lancashire wide accord developed in partnership with local authorities, NHS and the third sector, aiming to streamline communication pathways and join working together. The Council's relationships with the third / voluntary sector have been further strengthened due to effectively working together in response to the pandemic starting in March 2020 and forging new ways of working together which can continue to be developed.

Arrangements are in place for the provision of Shared Services with Fylde Borough Council in a number of areas, the most significant being the Revenues and Benefits Service. Shared arrangements are also in place with Blackpool Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust in relation to emergency planning and information governance. The Council is also working jointly with other Fylde Coast authorities on the development of an enterprise zone and other economic prosperity opportunities to improve the local economy.

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The Council wholly owns 8 companies which are currently operating (7 companies limited by shares and 1 limited by guarantee). From a governance perspective each company has an adopted governance framework based on good practice codes in the corporate sector. The Boards generally comprise both councillor appointed non-executive directors and independent non-executive directors. The independent non-executive directors are in the majority. There is a group approach to corporate governance with the Company Secretary, Data Protection Officer and Head of Audit and Risk all appointed across the group which helps provide assurance to the various Boards of Directors and the Council in its role as shareholder.

The Council has a Shareholder's Advisory Board, (comprised of 3 elected members) which acts in order to ensure that the duties and responsibilities of the Council as the sole shareholder of each company are exercised through the Company and to manage overall relationships between the Company and the Council. The Shareholder's Advisory Board holds regular meetings with nominated Company representatives in relation to the strategic performance of each Company, in particular the business plan objectives and long term development and in doing so to provide feedback to the shareholder (as appropriate) and to each company on behalf of the shareholder. It also seeks assurance from each company on behalf of the shareholder, that there are appropriate controls in place for good governance and risk management matters. Meetings are held usually on two occasions per year with each company, with any others dependent on urgency of business.

Key Supporting Policies and Procedures

Shareholder's Advisory Board Agenda and Minutes	http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=337
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Annual Review of Effectiveness

Blackpool Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework, including the system of internal control. The stages included in the review process and the key findings from each are summarised below.

Good Governance Group

A Good Governance Group was established in October 2016 and has led on the review of effectiveness and the production of the Annual Governance Statement to ensure that governance issues identified have subsequently been addressed. This group is chaired by the Director of Governance and Partnerships and attended by the Head of Audit and Risk, Head of Democratic Governance, Transformation Manager, Head of Legal Services, Head of ICT, Chief Accountant, Head of Information Governance and the Head of Organisation and Workforce Development.

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An internal audit of the 2018/19 Annual Governance Statement was undertaken in 2019/20 the findings of which were reported to the Good Governance Group. Best practice recommendations arising out of this report have been incorporated into the 2019/20 Annual Governance Statement.

Elected Member Workshop

A virtual workshop was held on the 30th July 2020 with elected member representation and facilitated by the Head of Audit and Risk, Director of Governance and Partnerships and the Transformation Manager.

The workshop was based around the principles of good governance and elected members were asked to establish what arrangements are already in place and these have been reflected in the overview of the governance framework included in this report. Elected members were also asked to identify areas for further development and these have been incorporated into the governance issues action plan.

Meetings were also held between the Leader of the Council, Chair of Audit Committee, Director of Governance and Partnerships and Head of Audit and Risk to discuss the interim AGS and the final draft of the AGS prior to the document being considered by the Audit Committee.

Key Officer Consultation

Key officers who are involved in governance were consulted as part of the production of the Annual Governance Statement. This consultation identified a number of areas of good practice and these have been summarised in the governance framework outlined earlier in this report and areas for improvement have been captured in the significant governance issues action plan.

Control Self-Assessment Questionnaire

The Corporate Leadership Team was required to complete a control self-assessment questionnaire providing assurance that their directorates were compliant with a number of key controls.

Review of 2019/20 Actions

A summary of the actions completed in 2019/20 can be seen in **Appendix 1** and any partially implemented actions have been carried forward into the 2020/21 action plan.

Mid-Term Review

Given the later approval of the 2019/20 Annual Governance Statement a review of progress against the actions will be reported to the March 2021 Audit Committee rather than the usual January meeting of the Committee.

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Assurance Statement

The results of the effectiveness of the governance framework have been considered by the Corporate Leadership Team and Audit Committee who have determined that the arrangements are fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.

Governance Issues

Actions have been identified as part of the 2019/20 review of the effectiveness of the governance framework and these are captured in the following table. It should be noted that some of the issues identified are not deemed significant but have been included to aid openness and transparency.

Issue	Actions	Responsible Officer (s)	Target Date
Code of Conduct and Behaviours	Consider the potential national changes to the Standards Framework and implement any changes identified as part of this.	Director of Governance and Partnerships	After mid-term review
	Develop a Local Code of Governance document which brings together and summarises the Council's overall approach to corporate governance.	Director of Governance and Partnerships	After mid-term review
Commitment to Openness, Communication and Consultation	Continue to deliver the channel shift agenda to improve accessibility to residents and reduce demand on Council resources with a focus on helping with the recovery of Blackpool following the pandemic.	Director of Resources / Director of Communication and Regeneration	After mid-term review
	Implement a Community Engagement Strategy and supported guidance to ensure a coordinate and robust approach is in place building on the learning gained during responding to the current pandemic.	Director of Public Health	After mid-term review
	Continue to deliver the web development plan ensuring that the Council adheres to the new accessibility requirements which are being introduced.	Director of Communication and Regeneration	After mid-term review

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Issue	Actions	Responsible Officer (s)	Target Date
	Explore ways in which to improve communication with ward councillors so that they are aware of major developments in their areas.	All Chief Officers	Before mid-term review
	Further strengthen how we communicate to residents building on the findings of the Corporate Peer Review.	Director of Communication and Regeneration	After mid-term review
	Identify ways in which data relating to the use of our green and blue spaces can be collated to help inform future decisions in relation to development of these areas.	Director of Community and Environmental Services	After mid-term review
Developing, Communicating and Translating the Vision	Consider how to deliver a thank you to all employees for the work that they have undertaken during the pandemic.	Chief Executive	Before mid-term review
	Complete the review of the Council Plan to ensure that the impact of the pandemic is captured and ensure that Council strategies are reviewed in light of the pandemic and amended accordingly.	Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Strategy	After mid-term review
Performance Management	Ensure that the changes implemented as a result of the Ofsted Report on Children's Services are adequately embedded to drive performance improvements.	Director of Children's Services	After mid-term review
	The suite of Council Plan headline KPIs will be reviewed so that some of the measures around post-COVID recovery can be incorporated into ongoing performance reporting. This review will also look to incorporate KPIs for a new corporate priority around organisational resilience, as recommended in the Corporate Governance Peer Review which took place in March 2020.	Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Strategy	After mid-term review

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Issue	Actions	Responsible Officer (s)	Target Date
	Implement the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Review once the report is received.	Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Strategy	After mid-term review
Compliance with Relevant Laws, Regulations, Internal Policies and Procedures	Ensure that data protection training is rolled out to staff who do not have IT access, monitor and renew the Council's Information Asset Register and develop a programme of GDPR compliance audits to ensure continued compliance with GDPR.	Director of Governance and Partnerships	After mid-term review
	Continue to explore procurement opportunities with local suppliers and look to provide training to local suppliers and elected members on procurement.	Director of Resources	After mid-term review
Audit Arrangements	Continue to embed effective working relations with the Council's new external auditors.	Director of Resources	After mid-term review
	Appoint to the vacant independent Audit Committee member post.	Director of Governance and Partnerships	Before mid-term review
	Opportunities to benchmark with other Audit Committees to continue to build on the success of the Committee will be explored.	Director of Governance and Partnerships	After mid-term review
Risk Management	The Audit Committee should seek assurance that systems of internal control have met the demands of the emergency response to Covid-19 and that where issues have been identified action has been taken to remedy these.	Director of Resources	After mid-term review
	Ensure that the Council has robust arrangements in place in preparation for the UK's exit from the European Union.	Director of Resources	Before mid-term review

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Issue	Actions	Responsible Officer (s)	Target Date
	Ensure that robust arrangements are in place to take effective action regarding the Climate Emergency.	Chief Executive	After mid-term review
Learning and Development	Continue the roll-out of Windows 10 incorporating training on how to work smarter using Office 365 and Microsoft Teams.	Director of Resources	After mid-term review
	A process will be put in place to enable all elected members to attend the modular training delivered to specific Committees. Where training is delivered virtually then consideration will be given to recording these sessions and make them available to all elected members.	Director of Governance and Partnership	Before mid-term review
	Undertake further work on succession planning to build on the Aspiring Leadership programme which has been developed.	Chief Executive	After mid-term review
Partnership and Joint Working	Consideration will be given to developing an overarching partnership governance framework document setting out partnership governance principles and including a register of significant partnerships.	Director of Governance and Partnership	After mid-term review
	Continue to work in partnership with the Lancashire Resilience Forum to ensure a pan-Lancashire approach to dealing with the current pandemic including longer term impacts on economic, social and environmental sustainability.	Chief Executive	After mid-term review
	Continue to strengthen communication with and support for the business sector particularly in terms of recovery from the pandemic and seek to maximise the	Director of Communication and Regeneration	After mid-term review

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Issue	Actions	Responsible Officer (s)	Target Date
	benefits from opportunities such as the Enterprise Zone.		
	Maximise the opportunity for digital literacy via the Fibre Blackpool project in order to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents.	Director of Resources	After mid-term review

Conclusion

We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the significant governance issues identified to further enhance governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Signed: (Leader of the Council)

Signed: (Chief Executive)

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Appendix 1 – Actions Completed in 2019/20

- The Communications Team now target specific groups of residents with specific messages using social media and also use more traditional forms of marketing and communication.
- Role descriptions for elected members were developed for key roles as part of the induction information which included knowledge, competencies and time commitment and this is supported by member induction training.
- Contract management arrangements have been strengthened through the launch of an iPool course for staff responsible for managing contracts and the appointment of a Social Value Coordinator. An internal audit review of contract management and social value was undertaken and the findings discussed with relevant members of CLT.
- A Driving at Work app has been developed and all employees who use their own vehicles on Council business are required to complete this. Failure to do so will result in mileage payments being suspended until the employees do comply.
- Joint working arrangements for fraud investigation with the DWP are now in place. These focus on cases where there is an interest in a joint prosecution such as where benefit and council tax fraud is suspected.
- A succession planning guide for managers has been developed and was launched alongside IPA 2019.
- A programme of Leadership training is in place and has been approved by CLT.
- The draft Community Engagement Strategy and Toolkit both encourage members to be notified of activity within their wards.
- Explored the potential of a mentoring system for newly elected members and decided on informal meetings to be decided via the political structure.
- Developed an information pack for managers to use with casual and agency staff for CLT approved mandatory training.
- The Council have visited to Wigan to assess the benefits of a Wigan deal approach to communications and engagement and consider what Blackpool can learn from this approach.
- Delivered the actions arising from the review of the scrutiny function by North West Employers via the working group which has been established.
- An employee conference was held in November 2019.