



**Interim
Annual Governance
Statement
2021**

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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Leeds City Council is obliged to ensure it has a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of its functions and the achievement of its aims and objectives; ensures that the financial and operational management of the authority is effective; and includes effective arrangements for the management of risk.

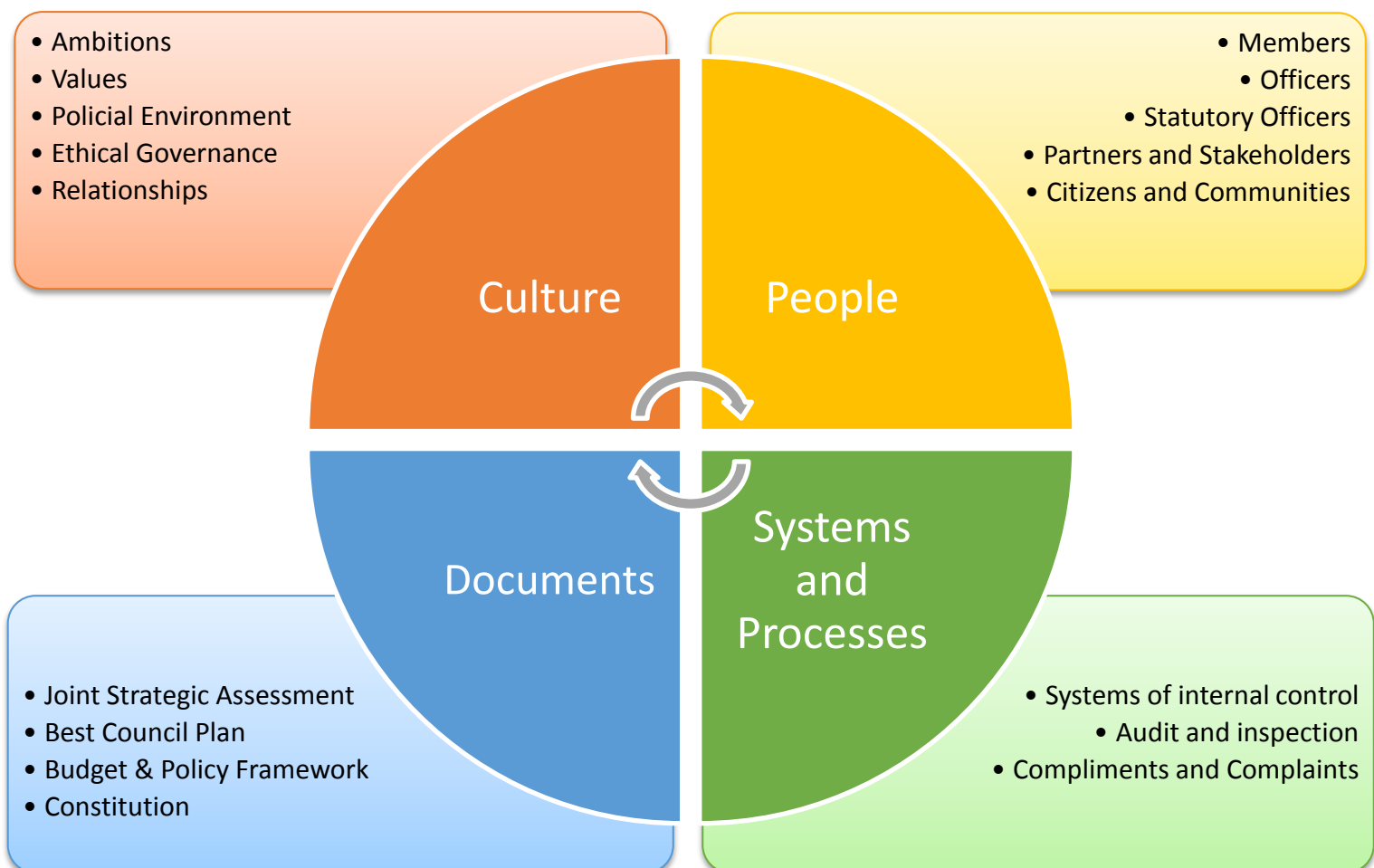
A.1 Method Statement

2. In accordance with the Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, we have conducted a review of the effectiveness of our system of internal control in accordance with proper practice as set out in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice: Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (2016).
3. Whilst supporting the Council's arrangements for risk management, the governance framework cannot eliminate all risk to the achievement of policies, aims and objectives and this review can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.
4. Similarly, this review provides assurance that we have in place appropriate processes to ensure transparency and democratic oversight in decision making but does not necessarily mean agreeing with all decisions made.
5. This statement is guided by CIPFA Bulletin 06 Application of the Good Governance Framework 2020/21 and describes our governance framework, the steps we have taken to ensure that it is effective and establishes key actions that we will put in place to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of our arrangements.
6. The review reflects formal reporting to Council and Executive Committees, and enquiries made of officers with relevant knowledge, experience and expertise. The review has been undertaken in consultation with the Council's Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer.

B. OUR GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

7. Our governance arrangements seek to ensure that we are able to devise and deliver services to the citizens of Leeds in a way that demonstrates accountability, transparency, effectiveness and value for money, integrity, and inclusivity.
8. Through our governance framework we:
 - account to, engage with and lead our communities;
 - monitor the achievement of our strategic objectives as set out in our Best Council Plan; and
 - consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate services and value for money.
9. Our Corporate Governance Code and Framework sets seven guiding principles together with commitments we make to give effect to each of these. Alongside these commitments the Code and Framework sets out the arrangements which support and evidence these commitments. These governance arrangements are a combination of the culture, people, documents, and systems and processes which together direct and control the Council's activities, as demonstrated at Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 – Governance Arrangements



B.1 Culture and People

10. Our culture is framed by our Best City and Best Council ambitions together with our five values. Our values are articulated, communicated and embedded through defined behaviours. These behaviours are evidenced through our relationships within the Council; with our partners and stakeholders; and with citizens and communities.

The Political Environment

11. We recognise the unique nature of the political environment in local government and expect a relationship of mutual trust and respect between all Members and officers.
12. Our political environment is characterised by an approach of cross party engagement through which we ensure that all our decisions are subject to rigorous oversight and robust challenge.
- 12.1. As Executive Members, Opposition Members provide meaningful challenge to Executive decision making.
- 12.2. Our scrutiny function is well resourced and developed and is afforded parity of esteem with the Executive.
- 12.3. Clear and embedded arrangements for the publication of key decisions enable effective democratic oversight of decisions taken by officers.
- 12.4. Regular performance reporting in relation to key strategies ensures effective accountability of those in operational control.

Officers

13. Our People Strategy 2020-25 sets out our commitment to best leadership and management and to best employee experience. Working through application of our Values this strategy underpins our approach to recruitment, work life, development, progression and exit.
14. Officer remit and accountability is clearly structured, communicated and monitored through delegation and sub-delegation arrangements, appraisal objectives and regular supervision.
15. Statutory officers are designated (as set out in Article 12 of our constitution), and there are protocols in place in our constitution to ensure that the Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance (S151) Officer are afforded the resources, access and opportunities required to fulfil their roles.
16. We have well established arrangements for information management and governance overseen by the Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO), Data Protection Officer (DPO) and Caldicott Guardian.
17. In addition, each Director is appointed as Proper Officer for matters within their remit in accordance with the Functions of Full Council set out in the Constitution.

Partners, stakeholders, citizens and communities

18. Our culture is characterised by openness, transparency, accountability and engagement with partners, stakeholders and citizens.
19. We are focussed on the needs of our communities, and use a variety of methods, including our Citizen's Panel to communicate and engage with our citizens and communities, to plan and deliver the right services in the right ways to achieve value for money.
20. We have a well-developed culture of partnership working in collaboration with public, private and third sector organisations across the city, and at regional and national level.

Continuous Development

21. We keep our arrangements under continuous review and look for opportunities to develop and improve.
 - 21.1. We have a well-established compliments and complaints process and learn from the feedback we receive.
 - 21.2. We commission and carefully consider independent reviews to inform our approach and development.
 - 21.3. We consider carefully the outcome of external reviews and inspections from both statutory bodies, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, and our peers.

Ethical Governance

22. We have Codes of Conduct for Members and officers which, together with a number of supporting protocols, set out clear expectations of behaviour; and arrangements for declarations of interests and of gifts and hospitality.
23. We have robust whistleblowing and counter fraud and corruption arrangements supporting our ethical governance.

B.2 Documents, Systems and Processes

Defining and achieving outcomes

24. We are updating our Joint Strategic Assessment in 2021, providing a detailed understanding of the citizens and communities in the Leeds area, and the challenges and opportunities as we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic. This understanding is then used to underpin not only our Health and Wellbeing Strategy but also to inform our Inclusive Growth Strategy and our response to the Climate Emergency.
25. Our ambitions and strategic priorities are articulated in our Best Council Plan, and we have arrangements in place to review the plan to ensure that it remains relevant and realistic in context. We monitor progress against the Best Council Plan through a series of Key Performance Indicators, with supporting performance monitoring taking place at Directorate level to identify any weakness in performance in order that appropriate effective action can be taken to bring performance in line with targets.
26. Our business continuity arrangements and risk management strategy and procedures work to identify and mitigate risk at corporate, directorate, service and project level. We recognise that risk management supports the delivery of the Best Council Plan, however this governance framework cannot eliminate all risk to the achievement of policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.

Financial management

27. We recognise that the Best Council Plan can only be delivered through a sound understanding of the organisation's longer term financial sustainability, enabling decisions to be made that balance the resource implications of the Council's policies against financial constraints.
28. Through the adoption of budget principles in respect of capital and revenue budgets, we have ensured a robust and accountable approach to budget management, closely aligned to the principles of CIPFA's Financial Management Code (2019).
29. We recognise that the current and future financial climate present a significant risk to the Council's priorities and ambitions, and that the Council's financial position must be robust,

resilient and sustainable with a sufficient level of reserves available to deal with any future unforeseen circumstances. Our five year Medium Term Financial Strategy, which is reviewed annually and supported by our financial management systems, underpins our sustainable approach.

30. Our budget is set and monitored to ensure delivery of our strategic objectives. Budget management and monitoring is a continuous risk based process which operates at a number of levels throughout the Council. Directors have responsibility for delivering directorate budgets whilst named accountable budget holders, supported by finance officers, manage, monitor and forecast income and expenditure against budgets. All Directorates have contingency plans in place to help to manage unforeseen variations against the budget.
31. We are transforming our business approach to ensure the availability of accurate, up to date, budget information for budget holders, ensuring budget management is part and parcel of service delivery.
32. Our arrangements for treasury management comply with CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the Prudential Code.

Inclusive, transparent and accountable governance

33. Our Constitution, which is reviewed annually, is published in the library on our website¹.
34. We operate a strong leader and cabinet governance model of governance. Arrangements for delegation of Council functions to committees and officers are set out alongside the Leader's executive arrangements in the Constitution to ensure clear arrangements for open, transparent and accountable decision making.
35. Decision making, financial arrangements and procurement activity are bounded by clear rules of procedure which focus our resources to the achievement of our strategic outcomes and are rooted in legal compliance.
36. We have strong and established arrangements for overview and scrutiny which recognise the need for parity between executive and scrutiny.

C. HOW WE HAVE REVIEWED OUR GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

C.1 Assurance Map and Framework

37. Our Assurance Map (at Figure 2 below), sets out the three lines of assurance providing ongoing assurance of the effectiveness of our governance framework.
38. In line with our Best Council ambition, our governance arrangements are subject to continuous review to identify opportunities for improvement. The Cycle of Internal Control (described in Figure 3 below) underpins each of our systems of internal control and recognises that arrangements should be defined and documented; clearly communicated, effectively embedded; meaningfully monitored; and reviewed and refined. Throughout this process we seek to ensure that risks are identified, assessed, and appropriately managed. Whilst this framework cannot eliminate all risk to the achievement of policies, aims and objectives it provides reasonable assurance of the effectiveness of our arrangements.

¹ [Council and democracy \(leeds.gov.uk\)](https://www.leeds.gov.uk/council-and-democracy)

Figure 2 – Assurance Map



Bodies charged with governance:		1 st line of defence	2 nd line of defence	3 rd line of defence			Statutory Officers
		Responsibilities for implementation and accountability for systems and processes of internal control		Arrangements for testing systems and processes of internal control			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full Council Corporate Governance and Audit Committee (Delegated responsibility for approval of Statement Of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement) 	Operational ownership and management	Oversight and compliance specialists	Independent Assurance				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directors and section heads sectional and directorate leadership teams Proper Officers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialist officers Officer groups, boards and forum 					
Systems and Processes of Internal Control <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business Continuity Counter fraud and corruption Customer contact and satisfaction Decision making Employment policies and procedures and employee conduct Financial planning and management Information Governance Performance management Planning regulation and enforcement Procurement policies and practices Risk management; and Treasury management 	Define and Document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear arrangements for sub-delegation of functions and responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of policy & procedure 	Internal Audit	External Audit	External Inspectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring Officer Chief Finance Officer Head of Paid Service
	Clearly Communicate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership – cascading of information and expectation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of guidance & training 				
	Effectively Embed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems of managerial control (Supervision / appraisal; reporting through leadership teams etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversight and advice tailored to service need 				
	Meaningfully Monitor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local performance monitoring; Identification and mitigation of risk; Escalation of concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of robust performance indicators; Benchmarking 				
	Review and refine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback on systems and processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of legislation, sector best practice and guidance; Strategic review of arrangements 				
Arrangements for reporting and oversight 	Officer oversight:	Corporate Leadership Team		Arrangements for reporting and oversight of action planning 			
	Democratic Oversight	Executive Members Executive Board Scrutiny Boards	Corporate Governance and Audit Committee Standards and Conduct Committee				

Figure 3 – Cycle of Internal Control

Define and document:

- ◆ Policy or strategy
 - ◇ Outcome focussed and clearly articulated?
- ◆ Roles and Responsibilities
 - ◇ Officer duties and boundaries clear?
 - ◇ Boards and panels have clear terms of reference?
 - ◇ Relationships and hierarchies clearly defined?
- ◆ Democratic Oversight

Clearly Communicate

- ◆ Training
 - ◇ Training available to all stakeholders?
 - ◇ Take up monitored?
 - ◇ Learning measured?
- ◆ Guidance
 - ◇ Easily accessible?
- ◆ Leadership
 - ◇ Leaders fully briefed?
 - ◇ Leaders cascade information / expectation?

Effectively Embed

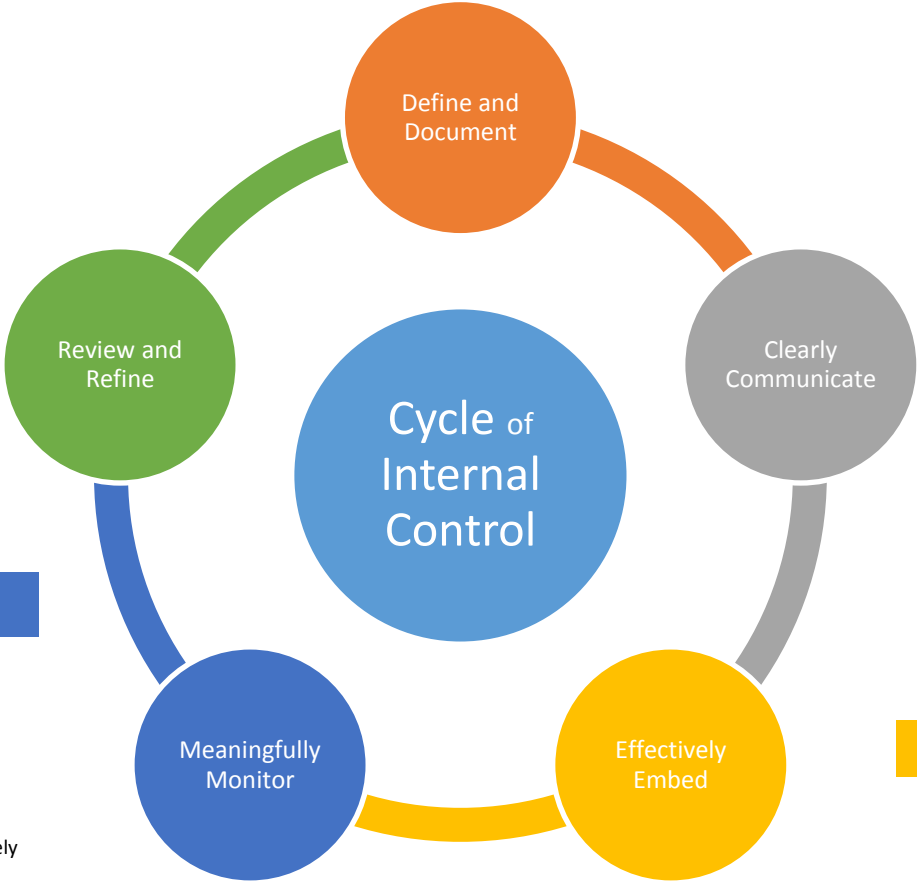
- ◆ Stakeholders / participants identified and appropriately engaged?
- ◆ Clear systems and processes in place?
 - ◇ Relevant?
 - ◇ Realistic?
 - ◇ Efficient?
- ◆ Engagement
 - ◇ Top down?

Review and Refine

- ◆ Up to date
 - ◇ Legislation and guidance?
 - ◇ Practical context?
- ◆ Fit for purpose
 - ◇ Meeting aims and objectives?

Meaningfully Monitor

- ◆ Benchmarking in place
 - ◇ Previous standards
 - ◇ Similar services / authorities
 - ◇ 'Best in breed'
- ◆ Pls robust and challenging
- ◆ Risk identified and mitigated
- ◆ Escalation process in place and used appropriately



C.2 Operational Ownership and Management

Officer Assurance

39. To corroborate the formal reporting of our governance arrangements we have undertaken work to identify whether those arrangements are embedded and operating effectively and efficiently on the ground.
40. We have undertaken a Survey of Internal Control, inviting responses from all officers with managerial responsibility at tier 4 and above. The survey is focussed on our 7 Corporate Governance principles and is designed to identify the extent to which officers are aware of and act in compliance with key controls in relation to each.
41. Survey respondents were invited to comment on arrangements which were working well and to identify any perceived weakness, as well as suggesting opportunities for improvement.

C.3 Specialist Oversight and Compliance

42. Officers with specialist oversight, or responsibility for compliance in relation to systems of internal control have been asked to provide information as to the systems and processes in place; and as to the assurance that these are operating soundly.
43. In addition, alongside the Survey of Internal Control we have collected specific assurance through questionnaires to officers with specialist oversight of specific systems of internal control.
44. Together these operational and specialist responses support and enhance the assurance reporting through Council Committees identified at section C4 below.

C.4 Democratic Oversight

45. The Council is responsible for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework. This review is informed by a number of sources and carried out under the oversight of elected Members through key governance bodies as described below. Our Assurance Framework (at Figure 4 below), sets out how assurance is received in relation to each of the three lines of defence, underpinning the assertions set out in this Annual Governance Statement.

Corporate Governance and Audit Committee

46. Corporate Governance and Audit Committee is the committee charged with oversight of the Council's governance arrangements, with responsibility for approval of the Council's accounting statements and this Annual Governance Statement.
47. The Committee is also responsible for both the oversight of the Council's Internal Audit Service and consideration of our external audit arrangements.
48. Through approval of the risk based annual audit plan, receipt of regular update reports in relation to both internal audit and counter fraud and corruption, and receipt of the annual report of the Head of Audit setting out their formal audit

opinion, the Committee is provided with independent assurance as to the effectiveness of arrangements for internal control.

49. Similarly, the Committee receives regular updates and reports from the External Auditor. Through consideration of the audit of the Council's accounts, and receipt of the External Auditor's opinion the Committee receives external independent assurance on the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements.

50. In addition, the Committee receives assurance directly through its own work programme.

50.1. A programme of annual assurance reports in relation to service specific controls (e.g. planning regulation and enforcement), and in relation to corporate systems of internal control (e.g. procurement, business continuity, or corporate risk arrangements) enable the Committee to critically examine arrangements for internal control, to provide robust and meaningful challenge and identify areas for growth and development.

50.2. The work programme is developed and managed flexibly by the Committee to enable consideration of further ad hoc reports in relation to matters of specific interest or concern. In this way the Committee has had oversight of the Council's Access project and ensured robust governance arrangements in respect of Public Services Network (PSN) certification having identified these issues through routine receipt of assurance reports in relation to information management and governance.

[Standards and Conduct Committee](#)

51. Standards and Conduct Committee is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by elected and co-opted Members of the Council. Through receipt of the Monitoring Officer's annual report the Committee has assurance that arrangements are effective in this regard.

[Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements](#)

52. The Council has five Scrutiny Boards, each responsible for the review and scrutiny of functions within their remit:

- Strategy and Resources;
- Infrastructure Investment and Inclusive Growth;
- Environment, Housing and Communities;
- Children and Families; and
- Adults, Health and Active Lifestyles.

53. Scrutiny boards identify desired outcomes linked to their recommendations to establish the added value scrutiny brings. An established recommendation tracking system then considers both progress against recommendations and their on-going relevance in terms of the identified outcomes with the resulting status of each action indicating whether and how further work should be undertaken.

54. The work programme for each Board includes opportunity to consider corporate risk and performance matters within their remit.

55. In addition, each Board is consulted in the development of budget and policy framework proposals. Given the significant financial challenge faced by the Council in balancing the budget for 2020/21 and setting a balanced budget for the

2021/22 financial year, a two phase consultation was undertaken, enabling detailed and robust consideration of savings proposals within the remit of each Board. Composite reports were then submitted to Executive Board in December and again in February, to inform their consideration of proposals.

Executive Board

56. Under the Leader's executive arrangements, oversight of executive decision making lies collectively with the Executive Board and individually with named portfolio holders in relation to matters within their remit. Through consideration of reports presented for determination, and regular briefing on matters within their oversight, the Executive is able to monitor the way in which decisions meet policy objectives, are open and inclusive, and reflect relevant risks.
57. Executive Board is a key stakeholder in the formulation of our policies. Those which form part of the Budget and Policy Framework must be recommended by Executive Board to Council for consideration; significant executive policies and strategies are approved by the Executive Board; and local policies for approval within directorates are subject to briefing with relevant executive Members. This provides assurance that the policy framework meets the strategic objectives.
58. The Executive Board carries out performance monitoring through receipt of service specific (e.g. Equality Improvement Priorities Progress Report) and corporate performance reports (e.g. regular Financial Health Monitoring reports and annual reports on both performance and risk management). In this way it receives assurance that arrangements are effective in ensuring that resources are used efficiently to deliver strategic outcomes.
59. Where specific issues are raised in relation to the Council's governance arrangements Executive Board are able to refer matters to Corporate Governance and Audit Committee for consideration. In this way Corporate Governance and Audit Committee considered arrangements for governance under devolution to the new Mayoral Combined Authority from May 2021, making recommendations in relation to accountability arrangements.

Full Council

60. In addition to its role in holding the Executive to account, Full Council receives the annual reports of key committees², enabling it to hold them to account for the effective discharge of relevant council functions.
61. Arrangements are in place to enable the receipt of formal reports of Statutory Officers as necessary.

² Corporate Governance and Audit Committee; Standards and Conduct Committee; Scrutiny boards; Plans Panels; Licensing Committee; Climate Emergency Advisory Committee

C.5 Independent Assurance

Internal Audit

62. We have a robust, independent and well respected Internal Audit Service, which draws upon a wide ranging programme of consultancy and advisory work in addition to the risk based audit plan, to provide assurance that our governance framework is embedded and effective.
63. The Internal Audit Service conforms to PSIAS³ and LGAN⁴.
64. In November 2020 the Head of Audit presented the Annual Internal Audit Report and Opinion to Corporate Governance and Audit Committee.
65. The report confirmed that the work undertaken to support the opinion was conducted in accordance with an established methodology that promotes quality and conformance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing, that there were no limitations in scope and that nothing had arisen to compromise the independence of the Internal Audit Service during the reporting period.

“On the basis of the audit work undertaken during the 2019/20 audit year, the internal control environment (including the key financial systems, risk and governance) is well established and operating effectively in practice. ... A satisfactory overall opinion is provided for 2019/20, based on the audit work detailed within this report.”

66. In providing this opinion the report recognised that ‘limited assurance’ opinions had been given in respect of some areas of review; and that in these cases recommendations for improvement had been made. Weaknesses identified were not material enough to have a significant impact on the overall opinion set out above. Follow up reviews will ensure that action plans are implemented as agreed in relation to services in need of improvement following limited assurance reviews.
67. The report drew attention to the change in risk appetite necessary to embrace and implement significant change necessary to the recovery stage of the Council’s pandemic response, and particularly noted that it is essential that senior management retain focus on embedding new and revised operational and governance arrangements, including innovative service delivery methods which have arisen in response to Covid-19.

External Audit

68. The Council’s external auditor is appointed through the PSAA framework.
69. The External Auditor worked closely with the Chief Officer Financial Services to gain assurance as to the Council’s response to the developing impact of Covid-19 on the financial landscape. They reported regularly to Corporate Governance and Audit Committee throughout this period.

³ Public Sector Internal Audit Standards

⁴ Local Government Application Note

70. External Audit provide independent assurance on the Council's accounts and accounting practice as well as the arrangements to ensure value for money and the controls around the key financial systems. Grant Thornton's 2019/20 ISA 260 Audit Findings report for Leeds City Council, concluded that:

"Overall, if Covid-19 had not taken place, the Council's financial position would have continued to be sufficiently stable to manage the financial impact of small unforeseen events as in previous years, however, the financial impact of Covid-19 has been significant and highlights the inadequacy of the Council's General Fund Reserves...Except for this matter, the Council had proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources."

Figure 4 – Assurance Framework

	1 st line of defence	2 nd line of defence	3 rd line of defence	Bodies charged with governance
	Operational ownership and management	Oversight and compliance specialists	Independent Assurance	
Corporate Governance and Audit Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service specific annual assurance reports • Ad hoc reports addressing key projects and risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Assurance reports in relation to corporate systems of internal control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audit (Approval of risk based plan, receipt of update reports; receipt of annual report and opinion) • External Audit (agreement of nature and scope of annual audit plan; receipt of progress reports; receipt of ISA260 and annual audit letter; certification of housing benefit grant claims) • External Inspection (consideration of external inspection reports and action plans) 	Approval of Annual Governance Statement and Statement of Accounts
Standards and Conduct Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation on development of Members' Code of Conduct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Report of Monitoring Officer 		
Scrutiny Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrangements for Call In 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation on development of budget and policy framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Inspection (consideration of external inspection reports and action plans) 	
Executive Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receipt of Service Specific Performance reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receipt of Corporate reports relating to performance and monitoring • Strategy and policy approvals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Inspection (consideration of external inspection reports and action plans) 	
Full Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold executive to account (executive questions and receipt of executive minutes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval of Budget and Policy Framework • Receipt of reports of Statutory Officers 		Receipt of Annual Reports
Officer Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey of Internal Control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialist Questionnaire 		

D. EFFECTIVENESS OF SYSTEM OF INTERNAL CONTROL

71. We set out below an assessment of the effectiveness of our arrangements in relation to each of the Principles of our Corporate Governance Code and Framework.
72. Whilst, in the main, our governance framework has proven to be robust, resilient and responsive to the impact of the ongoing pandemic, the following points demonstrate the way in which our arrangements have been implemented or revised in response to the evolving situation:

D.1 We will behave lawfully, with integrity and in the public interest and demonstrate this through our conduct and behaviour.

73. Our Internal Audit Service have undertaken significant effort in response to Covid-19, and the emerging fraud risks that have been identified nationally during this time. Work has included:
- the completion of comprehensive risk assessments and post payment assurance plans, for the Small Business grant, Retail, Hospitality and Leisure grant and the Discretionary grant schemes;
 - testing of those grant payments identified as higher risk, and liaison with colleagues and external bodies where appropriate.
 - provision of advice to the Council's Self-Isolation Payments workstream to ensure that all appropriate controls and checks are in place for these payments.
 - promotion of the council's counter fraud policies, the fraud awareness training, and provision of information relating to current and emerging fraud risks through the fraud and corruption InSite page.
74. Our legal services team formed an integral and essential part of the pandemic response and recovery work done across the Council and the city, ensuring legal and regulatory compliance:
- a cross service Covid-19 Response Team was established to ensure sufficient resource and expertise in place to provide corporate advice and support on interpretation of guidance and regulations and enforcement measures, working in collaboration with colleagues across many services;
 - a proactive approach has been adopted, anticipating regulations and preparing comparative information, for example, about tiers or roadmap stages;
 - the Head of Legal Services attended cross Council meetings including Organisational Silver command and Future events group to ensure appropriate legal oversight.
75. We have been working towards compliance with the principles of the Unison Ethical Care Charter in relation to externally commissioned services and are committed to working towards the Rowntree Foundation Living Wage through future accreditation as a living wage employer. Unfortunately, this work was paused due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

D.2 We will be open and engage with local communities, service users and our other stakeholders.

Working with Partners

76. Our locality working relationships provided a framework through which to respond to the impact of Covid-19 in our communities, and the neighbourhood Improvement Board will use its recovery plan to focus work going forward.

77. We continue to work with partners under the Leeds Outbreak Control Plan through regaining control of the virus; reopening the economy and society and into socio-economic recovery.
78. We have conducted a review of the multi-agency arrangements, to learn lessons from the response to Covid-19, for handling future incidents and challenges in the city and crucially to harness the strength of joint working to further improve how we all work together to achieve the city's ambitions. Overall, the findings of the review were very positive, with effective relationships being strengthened through Covid-19. Where opportunities for improvement were identified we have made clear recommendations, and will pursue and monitor these, and report progress through the council's Executive Board.
79. We will continue to consult and engage with communities, partners and other stakeholders to understand the impact of the pandemic. For example, we completed a consultation exercise in March 2021 looking at the future for the city and other district centres. Open for a six week period, this attracted 1300 responses and has provided a rich resource of information which we will analyse to help inform our planning for the future.

Working with Customers

80. Our customer contact arrangements were amended to accommodate social distancing guidelines and to support increased call volumes resulting from the pandemic, and some lines were switched off in favour of digital access solutions. Arrangements were and remain sensitive to the digital divide in the city; ensuring that there is always a meaningful alternative to digital access; maintaining public access computer availability through our public libraries throughout the second and third lockdown periods; and working with partners across the city to promote digital access for all.
81. Organisational changes responding to the financial challenge are informed by our experience during the pandemic. We will develop closer working between contact centre and digital colleagues to enhance the customer's digital journey, while maintaining close working between the contact centre and face to face customer service provision to ensure a one council face and experience.

Tackling Inequality

82. We continue to tackle inequalities in Leeds through our Equality Improvement Priorities. We are working to understand the disproportionate or differential impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had in Communities of Interest, and for those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. We will use this information to inform new Strategic Equality Improvement Priorities for 2021-25, aligned closely to our eight Best City Priorities, with the Inclusive Growth Strategy, health and Wellbeing Strategy and Climate Emergency declaration as key drivers.

D.3 We will focus our resources on outcomes and ensure council tax payers and service users receive excellent value for money.

83. Our Best Council Plan⁵ was reviewed and revised in July 2020 to reflect the change in context for the plan, placing emphasis within our Best City ambition on our desire for Leeds to be a safe city.
84. We are aware that the impact of the pandemic has been broad and far reaching, and that it will be necessary to review our health and wellbeing, and inclusive growth strategies as we develop our understanding of this. We accept that this will take time to achieve as the City continues with the process of recovery from the pandemic.
85. Our Joint Strategic Assessment will be used to inform our strategic planning in respect of each of our three key pillars: inclusive growth; health and wellbeing; and climate emergency. This will enable the recalibration of city wide priorities post pandemic, building on the significant partnership working which developed through the pandemic and continues to support meaningful collaboration and appropriate and timely information sharing.
86. We have commenced a programme of review of a number of policies which will together form a platform from which to assess and review these key strategies, including the likely introduction of a City Plan for Leeds in place of the current Best Council Plan.

Procurement

87. Urgent procurement in response to Covid-19 has been undertaken; impacting on the number of waivers necessary and diverting efforts from cost saving and income generation measures planned.
88. We have reviewed our procurement strategy to identify possible savings using a number of approaches including stopping procurement or slipping into future years and reviewing contract specifications.

Financial Management

89. Covid-19 has had a significant impact upon the level of resources available to the Council in both 2020/21 and 2021/22.
90. From the outset of the pandemic our budget has been closely monitored with monthly financial health reports presented to Executive Board, and we worked at pace to identify and implement service reviews to deliver a balanced budget in the 2020-21 financial year, and to set a balanced budget for the 2021/22 financial year.
91. We established a “Financial Challenge” programme of service reviews, with a cross council ‘Silver’ Group to provide high support, co-ordination and consistency to the identification of robust, realistic and deliverable budget savings proposals. The same group will have oversight of the 2021/22 budget savings programme and will ensure that any variation to budgeted assumptions will be identified and addressed.

Service Delivery

92. We acknowledge that both the pandemic and the financial challenge faced by the Council have impacted on the delivery of a range of services across the city. Where necessary we have

⁵ <https://www.leeds.gov.uk/your-council/plans-and-strategies/council-plans>

reviewed progress and deliverability of programmes in place and taken transparent decisions to revise scope and delivery.

D.4 We will ensure we have clear responsibilities and arrangements for transparent and effective accountability.

93. In the absence of an Annual Meeting the City Solicitor approved the publication of the Council's Constitution for the 2020/21 municipal year in May 2020. Amendments have been made as required in accordance with established arrangements.
94. The Leader made immediate arrangements to put executive arrangements in place when he was appointed by Council in February 2021. Directors formally approved amendments to their sub-delegation schemes to reflect this change in Executive arrangements.
95. Similarly, constitutional delegations and Director's sub-delegations have been amended to give effect to organisational changes which took place in April 2021.

D.5 We will take informed and transparent decisions.

96. Meetings of the Council, Executive and their committees were paused on introduction of social distancing guidelines and reintroduced over a period of time when legislation was passed to enable remote meetings. Reintroduction was planned and phased on the basis of risk and necessity.
97. In the absence of formal Executive Board decision making at the outset of the pandemic informal consultation meetings were held in order to provide democratic oversight of decisions taken in the Board's place by Directors with appropriate delegated authority. Executive Board resumed formal meetings and therefore responsibility for decision making in April 2020.
98. In the initial weeks of the pandemic a number of officer decisions were taken outside of the controls set out in the decision making framework. These decisions were regularised through the first meeting of Executive Board in 2020, and officers reminded of the importance of complying with the decision making framework to ensure transparency and accountability.
99. Systems and processes for reporting and publishing officer decisions were reviewed regularly to ensure they were proportionate and responsive whilst meeting statutory requirements. In October 2020 General Purposes Committee approved guidance in relation to the publishing of officer decisions which has been communicated and embedded.

D.6 We will ensure that we have robust and effective audit, scrutiny, information governance, risk and financial management controls.

Business Continuity

100. The pandemic resulted in the biggest test to date of our business continuity arrangements. As Covid-19 escalated rapidly, with far reaching consequences beyond the anticipated threats to business as usual contained in business continuity plans, we responded quickly to provide additional emergency support at corporate level through the Essential Service Planning Framework that we developed.

101. Business Continuity Plans are subject to an ongoing process of review and will be evaluated and refined as appropriate on the basis of our experience during the period of the pandemic.
102. We will review the Business Continuity Framework later in 2021 in light of the learning from the pandemic.

Risk Management⁶

103. We have reviewed our risk management Policy and Strategy, and Executive Board will be invited to consider the risk framework and approve the revised arrangements at their meeting in July 2021.
104. As shown in our Corporate Risk Map⁷, we increased the risk ratings in relation to financial and economy risks and established a new specific coronavirus corporate risk which we have reviewed, updated and monitored through regular update reports on the pandemic to Executive Board. The annual Corporate Risk Report, to be presented to Executive Board in July 2021, will include an updated corporate risk map reflecting the current position.
105. We have established 'Silver Groups' which form part of the ongoing strategic activity in place across the council to identify and manage Covid-19 related risks. Our risk management framework also plays an important role in the city's multi-agency command and control arrangements, which have been developed further in response to Covid-19 to facilitate the coordination and communication on a set of complex interrelated challenges.

Scrutiny

106. Scrutiny work has continued throughout the pandemic and has continued to add value to the Council's work:
- 106.1. Scrutiny Chairs provided independent oversight of officer decision making under urgency arrangements at the outset of the pandemic;
 - 106.2. Scrutiny Boards considered the impact of the pandemic on key services;
 - 106.3. Action tracking enables account to be taken of the changing landscape against which recommendations are delivered.

Information Governance

107. In order to support the pace of delivery of services in response to Covid-19, whilst ensuring data compliance we introduced a shortened Data Protection Impact Assessment template, meaning that risks could be highlighted and mitigated in a timely way.
108. Our Public Service Network (PSN) submission was deferred due to Covid-19 pressures with the agreement of the Cabinet Office. We are working in line with the action plan submitted to the Cabinet Office in December 2020; and will submit our PSN application in July 2021.
109. In response to an ongoing difficulty meeting statutory deadlines for data access requests we have undertaken a significant review of our arrangements. We are implementing a number of recommendations and will embed these within the service review. We will continue to report performance through Corporate Leadership Team and Executive Board.

⁶ See our Corporate Risk Management Report 2020

(<https://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/Annual%20corporate%20risk%20report%20-%20June%202020.pdf>)

⁷ <https://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/Corporate%20Risk%20Map.pdf>

Financial Management

110. Recognising the significant financial challenges facing the Council, especially given the ongoing financial impact of Covid-19, we have established an effective financial control environment and specifically robust arrangements for strategic financial planning combined with effective financial management and control. We also have a sound framework for reviewing and challenging financial performance, realistic plans in place to make the necessary savings in the 2021/22 financial year and are taking the appropriate steps to deliver them. Directorates have contingency plans in place to help to manage unforeseen variations against the budget.

D.7 We will develop our capacity and capability to be effective.

Human Resources

111. Our People Strategy was reviewed alongside the Best Council Plan and launched in July 2020.
112. We developed a Flexible Resourcing Plan in conjunction with Trade Unions to support workforce agility and deployment, ensuring that key services could continue and that there was effective support to citizens in the shielding cohort.
113. In response to organisational pressures, arrangements for officer appraisals were amended enabling mid-year check-ins to prioritise wellbeing of staff.
114. We have undertaken regular staff surveys to gather the views of staff, and to identify and provide support in relation to wellbeing issues.
115. We have developed plans for future ways of working taking into account the needs of individual staff members, the needs of services and the resources available to the Council including our estate and digital resources.
116. Responding to financial pressures we introduced a range of voluntary measures in support of service reviews, these included the early leavers initiatives (ELI) together with a range of voluntary options to achieve savings needed in the staffing budget. All business cases were required to address service continuity, enable service reconfigurations and workforce deployment.
117. We have provided elected members with training and support to access and participate fully in remote meetings.
118. We have reviewed our Member Development programme to ensure the continuing development of Members, using appropriate technology to deliver remote learning.

E. KEY ACTIONS

119. Where our review of our systems of internal control reveals weakness or opportunities for improvement in our arrangements we identify key actions to meet these. We establish an action plan, which is monitored, and progress reported to Corporate Governance and Audit Committee.

E.1 Key Actions from 2020

120. Our 2020 Annual Governance Statement identified twenty key actions which have been monitored by Corporate Governance and Audit Committee.

121. Each of the key actions identified has been completed or has clear arrangements in place for completion and reporting where actions are ongoing.

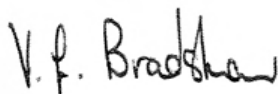
122. Annex 1 to this Statement sets out the outcome of each of our key actions, together with the relevant source of assurance.

E.2 Key Actions for 2021

123. We will review the results of our survey of internal control (see section C2) and specialist questionnaires (see section C3) and will develop a detailed action plan responding to issues and opportunities for improvement these raise. Our action plan will be prepared and included in the final Annual Governance Statement and monitored by officers under the oversight of Corporate Governance and Audit Committee to ensure that appropriate progress is achieved.

F. CONCLUSION AND ASSURANCE STATEMENT

124. We are satisfied that in the period from April 2020, our framework of internal control has continued in place at the Council for the year ended 31 March 2021 and up to the date of approval of the Statement of Accounts.
125. From our review we have concluded that, overall, key systems are operating soundly, and that there are no fundamental control weaknesses. We are satisfied that where improvements have been identified, actions are in place with appropriate arrangements to monitor them.
126. We confirm, to the best of our knowledge and belief, and there having been appropriate enquiries made, that this Annual Governance Statement provides an accurate and fair view.



Victoria Bradshaw

Chief Officer Financial Services & Section 151 Officer

ANNEX 1 - KEY ACTIONS 2020 – OUTCOMES

	Key Action	Outcomes
1	Our Corporate Governance and Audit Committee will seek robust assurance that our 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.	Corporate Governance and Audit Committee have received wide ranging reports providing assurance in relation to each of our key systems of internal control. Each of these has reflected on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and noted action taken to meet the demands of the emergency response.
2	We will work within the statutory framework with the Constituent Councils in pursuance of the “minded-to” Deal for devolution in West Yorkshire.	Executive Board and Full Council have been fully engaged in the process of consultation and consent, culminating in the West Yorkshire Devolution Order being made in January 2021. Mayoral Elections will take place in May 2021.
3	We will develop detailed timelines and milestones for our People Strategy priorities and will monitor and review progress against them.	2020-25 People Strategy was refreshed in June 2020 alongside the Best Council Plan. The plan focusses on three elements: Health, safety and wellbeing; Responding to financial challenges; and New ways of working. The Chief Officer Human Resources has prepared regular updates to Executive Board within the Covid-19 response reports, showing how we continue to meet expectations under these headings.
4	We will continue to monitor arrangements for customer contact and satisfaction and will make improvements where necessary to deliver a consistent experience for our customers.	We have developed a set of customer care standards; and work is ongoing to produce an investigating officer guide for handling complaints effectively. The Annual Assurance Report to Corporate Governance and Audit Committee on Arrangements in relation to Customer Contact and Satisfaction demonstrates the flexibility of the service and the agility in developing new services, exceptionally quickly, in order to provide appropriate support for customers in unprecedented times. Significant organisational changes are taking place in the council and will support closer working with digital colleagues and further enhance the customers’ digital journey.

	Key Action	Outcomes
5	We will review the Best Council Plan and key underpinning Best Council Strategies in the light of the longer-term implications of Covid-19.	<p>Our Best Council Plan, updated for 2020-25, was further reviewed before launch in July 2020 to take account of the changes required in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. Since then we have updated our Medium Term Financial Strategy to explain how the Council is meeting the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic; and we are developing an economic recovery plan drawing on three pillars of inclusive growth, health and wellbeing and the Climate Emergency to guide our work in relation to recovery from the economic impact of the pandemic.</p> <p>A more fundamental review of the council's strategic framework will be undertaken during 2021, drawing on the new Joint Strategic Assessment, Covid-19 Lessons Learned Review and other activity. It is likely that this review will see a move towards a City Plan for Leeds, replacing the Best Council Plan. This will continue to take account of the three pillars of inclusive growth, health and wellbeing, and climate emergency, and it is intended that this will be considered by Full Council in early 2022.</p> <p>The key supporting strategies – health and wellbeing and inclusive growth – are both scheduled to be fully reviewed and refreshed in 2022 in light of Covid-19 and following the adoption of the new city plan.</p>
6	We will monitor the arrangements for offer and acceptance of gifts and hospitality by Directors and those in 'high risk posts'; and positive declarations regarding compliance with the gifts and hospitality policy.	Arrangements are in place for monitoring officer interests and offer and acceptance of gifts and hospitality, including requirements for nil returns in relation to high risk posts. The Annual Assurance Report to Corporate Governance and Audit Committee on employment policies and procedures and employee conduct confirmed that those arrangements have been complied with.
7	We will continue to engage with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association in developing the ethical framework in response to the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life.	A new Code of Conduct was approved by Full Council at its meeting in March 2021, with effect from the start of the New Municipal Year. Arrangements have been made to train Councillors on the requirements of the new model code of conduct. It is likely that a review of the operation of the new Code will take place in the early Autumn by the Standards and Conduct Committee. That review would also take account of any new guidance or amendments to the new national Code issued by the Local Government Association (LGA).

	Key Action	Outcomes
8	We will continue to use benchmarking to measure our performance in relation to Caldicott Guardian functions and to identify, and learn from best practice	The Annual Assurance Report to Corporate Governance and Audit Committee on Arrangements in relation to information management and governance and Caldicott Guardian confirmed that benchmarking has taken place and informed the development of best practice, including a review of the Requests Team, and the service restructure.
9	Our Corporate Governance and Audit Committee will regularly review plans to deal with outstanding and emerging issues relating to PSN Certification, including the Access project.	<p>Corporate Governance and Audit Committee have received regular reports in relation to plans and progress in relation to PSN.</p> <p>The Committee has received confirmation that there are no Access 2003 databases remaining; and that arrangements are in place to phases out Access 2010 databases. Progress in this regard will be reported with the wider compliance reporting in relation to PSN.</p> <p>The Committee has also received confirmation that a plan has been developed and agreed with the Cabinet Office to deliver a compliant PSN application by end July 2021. The Cabinet Office have in return confirmed that the Council's current PSN certification remains valid until that time.</p>
10	Corporate Governance and Audit Committee will continue to seek assurance in relation to arrangements for enforcement in relation to breach of planning control.	The Annual Assurance Report to Corporate Governance and Audit Committee on Arrangements in relation planning regulation and enforcement set out details of existing enforcement arrangements. In line with the Committee's recommendations the Chief Planning Officer has developed an Enforcement Protocol relating to breach of planning control on Council land which has been shared with all Members of the Committee.
11	We will review our practice against detailed guidance underpinning the CIPFA Financial Management Code 2019.	<p>We have reviewed our arrangements in conjunction with the CIPFA Financial Management Code 2019 together with the CIPFA Delivering Good Governance Framework 2016, and we are able to demonstrate that arrangements are consistent with the requirements of the Code and Framework.</p> <p>Corporate Governance and Audit Committee will be provided with confirmation of this in the annual assurance report on financial management arrangements (on the Work Programme for November 21).</p>

	Key Action	Outcomes
		In addition on April 1st 2020 the National Audit Office's new Code of Audit Practice requires external auditors to undertake a detailed review of a local authorities arrangements for achieving value for money and the outcome of this review will be reported to Corporate Governance and Committee in January 2022.
12	We will complete and implement a review of the financial service to ensure that it remains a highly effective and responsive function offering value for money.	We have completed the Financial Services Review and are now moving to the new operating model and organisational structure. In addition, we are undertaking a number of transformational work packages (projects) reported through a Core Business Transformation (CBT) Programme Board, chaired by the Chief Finance Officer. The Annual Assurance Report to Corporate Governance and Audit Committee on financial management arrangements provided assurance in this regard.
13	We will review our core systems and processes with a view to ensuring that they are up to date and fit for purpose and meet the needs of an efficient, enterprising and healthy organisation.	In September 2020 Executive Board received a report detailing work undertaken to review our core systems and processes, and have develop a specification for a cloud based Enterprise Resource Planning solution (ERP) and implementation plan which will provide systems for financial management, payroll, procure to pay and human resources. It is expected that the implementation phase of the programme will take 2 years, but elements of the solution will go live earlier than this. This final timeline will be dependent upon the implementation plan presented by the winning supplier as a result of the procurement exercise. A further update will be brought to Executive Board prior to contract award.
14	We will undertake training to further promote the importance of compliance with Contracts Procedure Rules and will strengthen the close working between directorates and PACS that will ensure waivers are limited to exceptional circumstances.	Corporate Governance and Audit Committee received the annual Procurement assurance report in June 2020 confirming the work undertaken to communicate the procurement strategy and policies and to ensure compliance with the Contracts Procedure Rules (CPRs). The report also provided assurance in relation to the monitoring of performance in relation to waivers to ensure compliance with the CPRs
15	We will measure and collate key performance indicators (KPIs) to ensure that social value outcomes are achieved through our procurement practice.	Corporate Governance and Audit Committee received the annual Procurement assurance report in June 2020 confirming that through procurement of the Social Value Portal, enabling us to measure and monitor an identified set of internal KPIs based on themes, outcomes and measures (TOMs) to ensure

	Key Action	Outcomes		
		social value is embedded throughout procurement and contract management. The Portal provides performance data in relation to commitments made and delivered in respect of live projects.		
16	We will review how Leeds' approach in developing and monitoring the Best Council Plan compares with that of other core cities.	Corporate Governance and Audit Committee received the annual assurance report on performance management arrangements in December 2020 confirming that a review of strategic plans and performance monitoring arrangements in other UK Core Cities had been undertaken, noting that the approach to the Best Council Plan compares favourably. The work identified the use of 'City Surveys' which we will explore further to establish whether we can enhance our arrangements.		
17	We will review the key performance indicators relating to inclusive growth and development of housing mix and will add additional meaningful KPIs as required to the Best Council Plan	Corporate Governance and Audit Committee received the annual assurance report on performance management arrangements in December 2020 confirming that Best Council Plan KPIs are regularly reviewed to take account of a range of performance related developments including changes in national standards and statistical information requirements.		
18	We will continue to pursue actively the appointment of an Independent Member to the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee in the 2020/21 Municipal Year	Council appointed a non-voting independent Member of Corporate Governance and Audit Committee on 24 th February 2021 for a term of four years.		
19	We will include the identification of areas for future work in our Committees' annual reports to Council.		Report approved by reporting body	Report received by Council
		Scrutiny	Scrutiny Board Chairs – June 2020	September 2020 (19-20 Report)
			Scrutiny Board Chairs – June 2021	TBC (20-21 Report)
Standards and Conduct Committee	Committee - February 2021	March 2021 (20-21 Report)		

	Key Action	Outcomes		
		Corporate Governance and Audit Committee	Committee – March 2020 Committee - March 2021	November 2020 (19-20 Report) TBC (20-21 Report)
		Planning	Plans Panel Chairs – November 2020	January 2021 (19-20 Report)
		Licensing	Committee - March 2021	March 2021 (2020 Report)
		Community Committees	Community Committee Chairs	January 2021 (19-20 Report)
20	We will monitor and review the process we have implemented to ensure consistent emphasis on delivery of planned savings throughout the lifecycle of invest to save initiatives.	<p>We have developed a clear process and associated guidance for Invest to Save Projects. Proformas are used for identification and specification of invest to save initiatives. These are presented to Finance Performance Group enabling challenge and escalation as appropriate. The process will also require post project review as relevant projects complete which will underpin continuous improvement.</p> <p>In addition, savings are built into the Medium Term Financial Strategy and progress against them is monitored through financial health monitoring.</p>		