

Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

What is Governance?

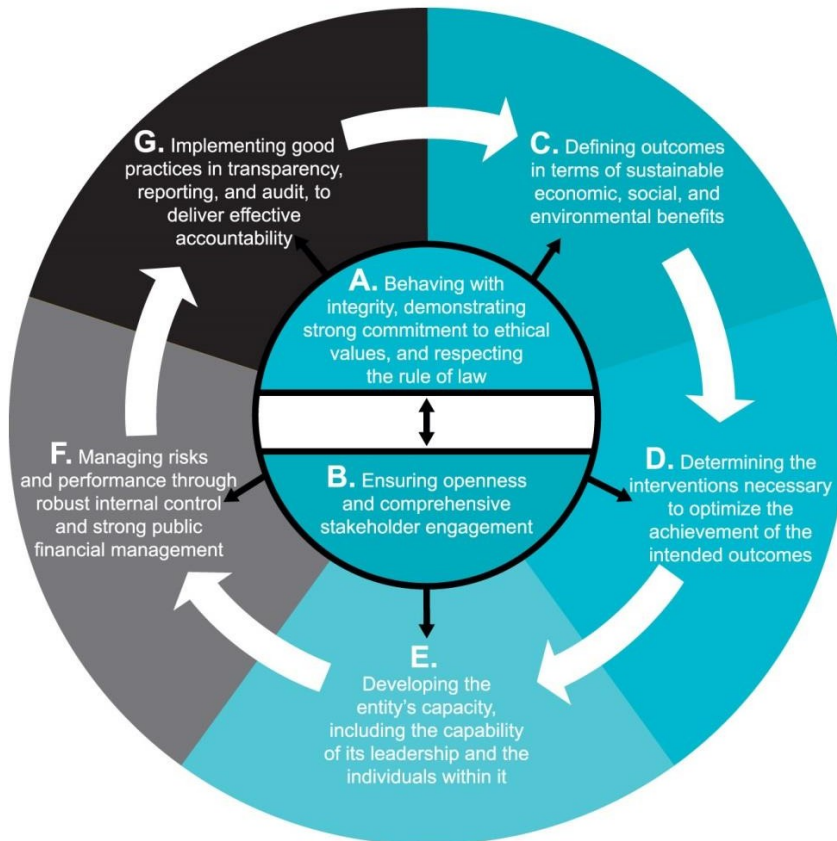
Governance comprises the arrangements put in place to ensure that the intended outcomes for stakeholders are defined and achieved.

To deliver good governance in the Authority, both governing bodies (Members) and individuals working for it must try to achieve the Authority’s objectives whilst acting in the public interest.

Acting in the public interest implies primary consideration of the benefits for society, which should result in positive outcomes for service users and other stakeholders.

The Core Principles of Good Governance

The diagram below, taken from the International Framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector, illustrates the various principles of good governance in the public sector and how they relate to each other.



Responsibility

The Authority is responsible for ensuring that its business is completed in line with the law and statutory legislation, and that public money is spent wisely and properly accounted for. We will ensure that we continually improve the way we provide our services, whilst considering value for money.

We will ensure that we put in place proper arrangements to ensure our risks are managed, and that controls and the governance process are in place.

We have approved and adopted a Code of Corporate Governance which is consistent with principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*. The Code demonstrates the supporting principles which underpin the core principles and identifies the assurance as outlined in the Framework. It also demonstrates what level of assurance we get and thus, identifies any areas for improvement. This forms the assurance framework for good governance and demonstrates that we know our governance arrangements are working. Links to all supporting evidence identified in the assurance framework are contained within the Code of Corporate Governance and are not repeated in this statement. The Code of Corporate Governance document is available on the Council's website.

Our Outcomes

Our desired outcomes for 2022-25 are detailed in the Corporate Plan and Council Vision. The Corporate Plan details our Vision and sets out our Thematic Priorities. Under each thematic priority, we detail our ambitions and how we are going to realise these. All outcomes we aim to achieve, along with changes we want to see and supporting information are detailed in the Corporate Plan.

For each activity or process we complete, we ensure that the appropriate governance arrangements are in place.

For 2023/24, we together with the rest of the UK, have faced a global crisis through the current geopolitical situations and 'cost of living' increases affecting our residents. This has been and will remain a significant factor affecting our operations in 2024/25 and beyond.

The Corporate Plan from 2022 to 2025 was approved at Cabinet on 17 March 2022. A new plan for 2025 is under development.

This work was brought together by councillors, during a number of councillor-led workshops and seminars, into a refocused vision to reflect new priorities. Again, this year collaborative budget setting workshops were held to ensure all councillors were able to have involvement in what is important to them and their residents.

Our vision is 'Tamworth – celebrating our heritage, creating a better future'

In order to achieve that vision, the Corporate Plan will be delivered with a workforce and organisation that has adapted to an unprecedented national challenge, working hand in hand with our partners and communities.

The vision, together with the Corporate Plan, details five areas of focus for the borough; including the key outcomes we are seeking to achieve and how we will work to achieve them.

Our primary areas of focus will be:

- The Environment
- The Economy
- Infrastructure
- Living in Tamworth
- The Town Centre

Each priority has a number of supporting areas of focus and progress will be achieved through the delivery of corporate and transformational projects; each having clearly defined objectives and outcomes.

CORPORATE PLAN SUMMARY

TAMWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL VISION

'Tamworth – celebrating our heritage, creating a better future'

1. THE ENVIRONMENT

- ▶ Enforcement and education with regard to litter and fly-tipping
- ▶ Development of infrastructure for acting on Climate Change
- ▶ Support more people to recycle and to reduce waste
- ▶ Working with partners to protect, maintain and improve the green space offer

3. INFRASTRUCTURE

- ▶ Review Local Plan to improve the transport links within Tamworth
- ▶ Improve existing walkways and cycling routes
- ▶ Ensure more people can access council services digitally/digital enhancement with partners and within Council housing stock

2. THE ECONOMY

- ▶ Development of business initiatives to promote start up and growth
- ▶ Support business growth to generate employment opportunities by working with businesses
- ▶ Provision of good quality and affordable housing
- ▶ Improve tourism in terms of good access to information for visitors to help local businesses and Tamworth as a destination as a whole, maximise and improve the quality of the visitor experience

4. LIVING IN TAMWORTH

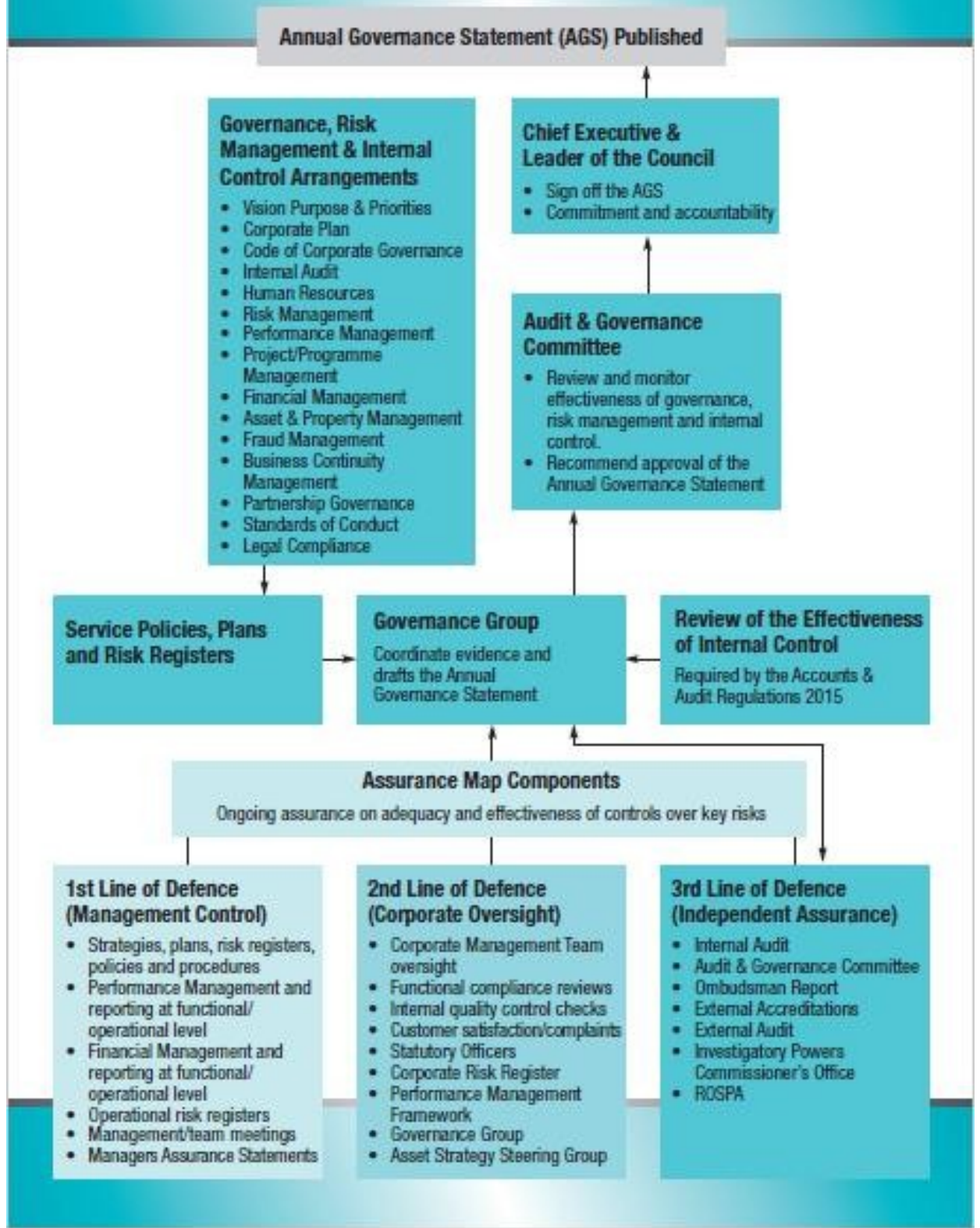
- ▶ Ensure adequate supply of affordable housing through the Local Plan review
- ▶ Investment in Neighbourhood and Place environment
- ▶ Through our Economic Development team, we will support job creation and business retention and expansion through interventions and advice, and seek to protect the local economy where we can influence this.
- ▶ Improve and promote Tamworth's historic and cultural assets and events
- ▶ Community Safety focus on neighbourhoods and place
- ▶ Working with partners to ensure the fear of crime within Tamworth is reduced

5. TOWN CENTRE

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Continue to develop street market and extend supporting events around the market to add vibrancy within the town centre ▶ Create a branding scheme for "Created in Tamworth" ▶ Provide the infrastructure to improve evening and night time economy ▶ Embrace Tamworth's history and culture so as to build a sense of local pride and support our children's education and understanding of the significant part Tamworth played in British history | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Continue to promote all outdoor events ▶ Development of a new Tamworth Enterprise Centre as part of the structural transformation of the town centre ▶ Make the town centre more accessible ▶ Provide the environment where the leisure and food offer can grow and flourish ▶ Working with others seek to improve the night-time transport offer to support the overall night-time economy |
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The Assurance Framework

The diagram below shows how the Assurance Framework is made up



What have we done to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our governance arrangements during 2023/24 including ensuring that those arrangements have not been compromised by the impact of the pandemic and subsequent recovery

The Authority has the responsibility for conducting an annual review of the effectiveness of its governance framework. This includes the system of internal control which is informed by:

- The work of Internal Audit which is detailed in the Internal Audit's Annual Report.
- the development and maintenance of the internal control environment by Corporate Management Team.
- Reports received from our External Auditors and any other review agencies or inspectorates.

During 2023/24, residents and our operations were impacted by cost of living increases. The Council continued to support vulnerable people, by making discretionary housing benefit payments and in developing a new 'banded' Localised Council Tax Relief scheme which was implemented on 1 April 2024. The COVID-19 emergency tested the Council's ability to move at pace, prioritise its service delivery and demonstrate its core values & purpose and this legacy sets the Council in good stead to meet any new or emerging challenges going forward.

To ensure our governance arrangements remained effective, the following actions have contributed to the evaluation of the effectiveness of the arrangements:

- The Council's Recovery & Reset Programme was formally closed on 31 March 2023, agreed at Cabinet on 6 April 2023 ([Link here](#)). The programme was subject to post implementation review by BDO (internal audit) and recognised as giving substantial assurance with significant success factors reported
- Increased residents' resilience and access to information through empowering and working with 'anchor' and third sector organisations to support our most vulnerable people
- Support our most vulnerable through preventing homelessness and helping people access suitable housing amidst major Government initiatives including the "everyone" in campaign, whilst also pausing non-essential moves
- Following meetings being held remotely due to the pandemic the Council recommenced its face to face meeting programme which are also streamed to YouTube
- The internal audit programme continued to include provision of days for assurance audits. This ensured that those charged with governance were able to obtain assurance over risks affecting the Council from the delivery of pandemic grants, such as productivity and governance. The ICT audit programme also included a review of Network Security.

The Council's 'business as usual' governance arrangements have continued to operate, including:

- The Code of Corporate Governance, set out in line with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*, has been reviewed and updated.
- Internal audit have reported to the Audit & Governance Committee on a quarterly basis and provided an opinion on the overall effectiveness of the system of internal control based upon the work completed. The statement for the 2023/24 financial year is as

follows:

'On the basis of audit work completed, Internal Audit's opinion on the council's framework of governance, risk management and internal control is reasonable in its overall design and effectiveness. Certain weaknesses and exceptions were highlighted by audit work. These matters have been discussed with management, to whom recommendations have been made. All of these have been, or are in the process of being addressed'.

- Our External Auditors provide a report to each Audit & Governance Committee. In their Auditors Annual Report (2022/23), they gave an unqualified opinion on the Statement of Accounts and an unqualified conclusion in respect of the Authority securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- The Corporate Risk Register is owned and reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Corporate Management Team and reported in the Quarterly Health Check to Cabinet. It is also reported in the risk management update to the Audit & Governance Committee.
- Manager's Assurance Statements have been completed by Executive Directors and Assistant Directors and have not identified any significant control issues.
- Financial Guidance and Financial and Contract Procedure Rules are reviewed on a regular basis, the latest review being approved by the Audit & Governance Committee in April 2024. A full review of the Constitution took place and was approved by Council in December 2020, this has been updated and will be presented to Council during 2024/2025 and scheduled for 9th July 2024.
- The Chief Finance Officer and Audit Manager are suitably experienced and qualified and comply with the CIPFA Statements on their respective roles.
- No issues were raised through the Counter Fraud and Corruption and Whistleblowing Policies.
- There were 20 data security breaches reported to the Data Protection Officer during the financial year, three of which were reported to the Information Commissioners Officer.
- Internal Audit are required to comply with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. As part of this requirement, Internal Audit are required to complete an annual self-assessment against the Standards and produce a Quality Assurance & Improvement Programme (QAIP). This identifies areas for improvement to ensure compliance with the Standards and other quality areas. The self-assessment against the standards and the QAIP are reported to the Audit & Governance Committee [Link](#). The five yearly External Quality Assessment was completed during 2022/23 and the service achieved the highest level of compliance 'generally conforms'. An action plan for actions identified during the review has been agreed and all actions were fully implemented during 2023/24.
- The Performance Management Framework ensures that the Financial Health Check is reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis and made readily available on the Authority's website.

- The Authority is currently compliant with the PSN Code of Connection. The compliance process includes assessments against governance, service management, information assurance conditions and technical controls and assures access to the Public Services Network. Our current compliance certificate expires in May 2024, the renewal process will be started prior to that to ensure continuity of PSN services.
- An annual update report is presented to the Audit & Governance Committee on the use of RIPA powers. During 2023/24, no RIPA authorisations were made.
- To assist in a more co-ordinated approach to managing projects, a Corporate Project Management template and process is now in place.
- A self-assessment of the Audit & Governance Committee's effectiveness was completed in February 2024.
- The Chairs of the Audit & Governance and Scrutiny Committees submitted their Annual Reports to Full Council.
- The Authority complies with the Financial Management Transparency Code.
- Counter-fraud work continues to be completed with the retained expertise of in-house staff to investigate corporate fraud.
- Internal Audit completes an assessment of the risk of fraud which is reported to the Audit & Governance Committee annually. The counter fraud plan and risk assessment were reported to the Committee in October 2023 and it was concluded that the Authority has adopted a response that is appropriate for its fraud and corruption risks and commits to maintain its vigilance to tackle fraud.
- In compliance with the Localism Act 2011, a report was presented to Full Council in October 2020 advising them of the number of complaints received regarding Members Conduct. A report was not submitted during 2023/24 but this will be addressed in 2024/25.
- The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman annual report letter was reported to Audit & Governance Committee in October 2023.
- The review of the Constitution and Scheme of Delegation was approved by Council in December 2020. It is due to be refreshed in 2024/25.
- The Anti-Money Laundering Policy was reviewed and refreshed by the Audit & Governance Committee in October 2023 and a new Prevention of Tax Evasion Policy was approved by the Audit & Governance Committee in October 2020.
- The Diversity and Equality Scheme (2020-24) and supporting action plan remain in place with a new scheme being developed for implementation in January 2025.
- The annual pay policy as approved in March 2024.
- The authority has continued to progress implementations of the organisation's response to the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). The Data Protection Officer continues to raise awareness of GDPR across the authority. As part of wider IT Governance work, policies and procedures have been reviewed or are being developed to meet our obligations under the GDPR and to ensure a robust governance framework is in place for our ICT systems and information assets.
- The Information Security Policy and Data Protection Policy has been rolled out across the authority and is a mandatory requirement for new starters. The authority's Corporate Privacy Notice along with Departmental Fair Processing Notices have been developed with reviews being undertaken when necessary.
- Information on our website has been reviewed and updated with guidance to support our customers' rights of access to their data. Work is progressing with suppliers to ensure the security and compliance of personal data held within our software

systems. An ongoing programme of cyber security awareness and training is undertaken across the authority with regular signposted updates on Infozone.

- As part of the remit of the Audit & Governance Committee during 2023/24 a review of the risks around the Future High Street Fund Programme was undertaken. The sub-committee meets quarterly and reports directly to the Audit & Governance Committee.
- Partnership working arrangements continued to strengthen and further develop with both our statutory and community and voluntary sector partners through the re-institution of the Tamworth Strategic Partnership framework.
- The Tamworth Advice Centre continues to provide valuable generalist debt and specialist advice to our most vulnerable citizens and was successfully procured and awarded in April 2022 to Mid Mercia CAB by the partnership team.
- We value our community and voluntary sector and the work they do within our community. Our Community Grants and Councillor Grants Programme, now administered through the Community Foundation for Staffordshire, continue to provide valuable support to our community sector.
- The *Place Based Approach* continues to grow and further develop; this is a collaborative partnership approach through the County Council Building Resilient Families programme that uses multi skilled teams, universal services, voluntary sector organisations, and communities, at the right time, to improve outcomes for children, young people, vulnerable people and our community. As part of this *Place Based Approach* we have been working in partnership to identify community and voluntary sector organisations that can offer children, families and vulnerable people help and support at the earliest opportunity.
- Financial resilience is a key requirement for local authorities. In February 2023 the Council set budgets balanced over 3 years for the General Fund, and over 5 years for the HRA. There are challenges and pressures in the years ahead exacerbated by the uncertainty over the future of local government funding and potential business rates reset, but work has commenced to deliver longer term sustainability strategy. The 30 year HRA business plan was refreshed during 2023/24, and this also indicates significant resilience issues over the longer term. Approval was given for the creation of a HRA Business & Viability Planning Project within the Social Housing Regulatory Programme in February 2024 to start to address these issues.
- The Authority has a moral and legal obligation to ensure a duty of care for children and adults with care and support needs across its services. We are committed to ensuring that all children and adults with care and support needs are protected and kept safe from harm whilst engaged in services organised and/or provided by the Council. We do this by:
 - Having a Safeguarding Children & Adults at Risk of Abuse & Neglect Policy and procedures in place
https://www.tamworth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/community_docs/Safeguarding-children-and-adults-at-risk-of-abuse-and-neglect.pdf ;
 - Having Safeguarding Children & Adults Processes which give clear, step-by-step guidance if abuse is identified.
 - Safeguarding training programme in place for staff and members.
 - Carrying out of the appropriate level of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks on staff and volunteers.
 - Working closely with Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board & Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Adult Safeguarding Partnership; and Staffordshire Police.

- Working with the Staffordshire Prevent Board to ensure that the Council has due regard to the Prevent Duty, ensuring that young people and adults at risk of radicalisation are identified and supported.
- The Authority recognises that it has a responsibility to take a robust approach to slavery and human trafficking. In addition to the Authority's responsibility as an employer, it also acknowledges its duty as a Borough Council to notify the Secretary of State of suspected victims of slavery or human trafficking as introduced by section 52 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. The Authority is committed to preventing slavery and human trafficking in its corporate activities and to ensuring that its supply chains are free from slavery and human trafficking. The Authority has included modern slavery and human trafficking information within the corporate safeguarding policy and training.

A Modern Slavery statement is prepared each year and endorsed by Corporate Management Team and Audit and Governance Committee.

<https://www.tamworth.gov.uk/safeguarding>

The Council will continue to develop and strengthen its approach to modern slavery trafficking in 2023/24 and updated statement prepared by September 2024.

- The Tamworth Vulnerability Partnership continues to meet each week and the Council is also committed to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) to ensure that partner organisations are working together to coordinate efforts to support high risk victims of domestic abuse, children, young people, families and vulnerable people across Tamworth.
- Tamworth launched a Social Housing Regulatory Programme in April 2023, building on a commissioned self-assessment of its regulatory compliance with the consumer standards for its stock retained services in 2021/2022. This assessment resulted in a risk based improvement plan, areas of which will be built into service plans for 2022-2025. The Programme oversight is championed by tenants and forms part of the Council's reporting on performance.

Declaration

We have been advised on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the Governance Framework by the Audit & Governance Committee and that the arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose. The issues which remain outstanding from previous years' Annual Governance Statements are detailed at **Annex 1** with actions to address them. No additional governance issues were highlighted during 2023/24. Other minor issues highlighted through the assurance gathering process have been noted with planned actions to address these. Monitoring of the completion of all these issues will be completed through reporting to the Audit & Governance Committee.

We propose over the coming year to take steps to address those matters raised to further enhance our 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 operations as part of our next review.

Signed

C. Dean

S. Gabriel

Leader

Chief Executive

Date

On behalf of the Authority

Significant Governance Issues

The significant governance issues identified in relation to previous iterations of our Annual Governance Statement, which remained significant issues for us during 2023/24 are detailed below:

No	Issue	Previous Action	Update 2023/24
1	<p>Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)</p> <p>Whilst actions have been taken to ensure that the MTFS remains balanced, this is still a significant risk to the Authority. The Business Rate Reset and Fair Funding Review will directly affect levels of income over the coming years and pose a financial risk to the Authority. These have been planned for so far as possible within the MTFS. The increasing demands of our customers also need to be considered.</p>	<p>On 12 December 2022, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Communities and Local Government published a written ministerial statement which was accompanied by a policy statement on the 2023/24 local government finance settlement and assumptions about the 2024/25 local government finance settlement.</p> <p>This statement came ahead of the 2023/24 provisional local government finance settlement announcement, which was published in December 2022, detailing local authority-level figures for 2023/24.</p> <p>The Government has set out some planning assumptions for the 2024/25 local government finance settlement as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Review of Relative Needs and Resources ('Fair Funding Review') and a reset of Business Rates growth 	<p>On 5 February 24, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Communities and Local Government published a written ministerial statement on the 2024/25 local government finance settlement. The one year settlement is reflected in the MTFS approved by Council on 27February 2024.</p> <p>The budget proposals included in the MTFS reflect the need to compensate for reduced income levels arising from the uncertain political and economic conditions and potential significant medium term reductions in Government funding. This is matched against a desire to continue to address the Council's priorities / issues identified by Members and at the same time to seek continuous improvement in service delivery.</p> <p>A number of uncertainties and risks remain with regard to local government funding, including the potential for a business rates reset, which may mean the Council losing its business rates</p>

		<p>will not be implemented in the next two years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council tax referendum principles will continue the same as 2023/24. • Revenue support grant will continue and be uplifted in line with baseline funding levels (assumed now to be now based on September 2023 CPI), while social care grants will increase as set out in the table above. • Business rates pooling will continue. • The Government will set out the future position of New Homes Bonus ahead of the 2024/25 local government finance settlement. <p>This settlement represents a ‘holding position’ until the next Parliament, aiming at stability. The ruling out of a business rates reset, or a fair funding review, means that the funding distribution will stay fairly stable (with the exception of Extended Provider Responsibility funding). But this means that the big questions about the future of the funding system remain unaddressed one way or another.</p> <p>While this means the Council will be able to retain its business rate growth for 2023/24 and 2024/25, it also means that the uncertainty continues and potentially the Council still faces losing this growth from 2025/26.</p> <p>There are also further uncertainties arising from current cost pressure and inflationary increases which have compounded the likely price increases for supplies that are required</p>	<p>growth; fairer funding review; and continuation of New Homes Bonus</p> <p>The development of a Sustainability Strategy is required in order to avoid significant financial cuts in future years. This will be developed alongside the Productivity Plan required as part of the Final Local Government Finance Settlement.</p> <p>The Plans will cover:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) transformation of services to make better use of resources; 2) opportunities to take advantage of advances in technology and make better use of data to inform decision making and service design; 3) ways to reduce wasteful spend within systems, including specific consideration of expenditure on consultants and discredited staff Equality, Diversity and Inclusion programmes – this does not include programmes designed to promote integration and civic pride, and counter extremism; and 4) barriers preventing activity that the Government can help to reduce or remove. <p>The Productivity Plan will be developed alongside the Sustainability Strategy, and will give consideration to increasing income, reviewing services, and tackling persistent over and underspends with a view to becoming</p>
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		<p>for building or construction/maintenance works.</p> <p>The Recovery & Reset Programme package of savings originally reported in July 2022 estimated savings to be in the region of c£3.5m over 5 years; £2.8m of which was unbudgeted capital costs for continuing to occupy Marmion House.</p> <p>As part of the update report to Cabinet on 10 November 2022, including those already built into the medium-term financial plan, the revised programme potentially delivers efficiencies of c£5.1m over the next 5-year medium term. This includes the c£3.5m already identified; plus, an additional £1.6m already delivered through the service re-design project within the programme.</p> <p>In light of the base budget and MTFS forecast considered by Cabinet on 1 December 2022, following the Leaders Budget Workshop on 30 November 2022, Managers were asked to identify further areas for potential savings – which have now been included in the policy changes, amounting to c.£1.8m over 5 years.</p>	<p>financially sustainable over the medium term.</p> <p>These plans will be developed over the coming months and will be presented to Members in June 2024.</p>
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No	Issue	Previous Action	Update 2023/24
2	<p>Regeneration/Capital Projects</p> <p>The Authority needs to ensure that capital projects are managed effectively to ensure that they are delivered and grant monies are spent appropriately and timely.</p> <p>There is a risk that developers will not develop timely in accordance with the Local Plan need.</p>	<p>Re-profiling of capital scheme spend from 2022/23 into 2023/24 is forecast at c. £29.2m relating mainly to the Future High Street Fund Regeneration schemes of c.£17m together with Disabled Facilities Grants (£1.3m). There is also lower levels of re-profiling for new affordable Housing development (£3.4m) and housing capital works (£4.4m) including a Decarbonisation scheme (£1.1m).</p> <p>It is anticipated that this spend will now occur during 2023/24 but the situation will be closely monitored. As part of the MTFs, Council in February 2022 approved the updated Capital Strategy which sets out the Council's approach to capital investment and the approach that will be followed in making decisions in respect of the Council's Capital assets.</p> <p>Capital investment is an important ingredient in ensuring the Council's</p>	<p>Re-profiling of capital scheme spend from 2023/24 into 2024/25 is forecast at c. £30.15m relating mainly to the Future High Street Fund Regeneration schemes of c.£15m together with Gungate Development (£2m) and Disabled Facilities Grants (£1.7m). There is also a requirement for re-profiling for new affordable Housing development (£1m).</p> <p>It is anticipated that this spend will now occur during 2024/25 but the situation will be closely monitored. As part of the MTFs, Council in February 2023 approved the updated Capital Strategy which sets out the Council's approach to capital investment and the approach that will be followed in making decisions in respect of the Council's Capital assets.</p> <p>As part of the approved Strategy, the following action plan tasks have been implemented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A post implementation review is completed for each scheme where learning is identified which could assist future projects or where there is a significant financial or political impact; b) The Asset Strategy Steering Group meet on a quarterly basis to scrutinise the completed post implementation reports and review the

		<p>vision is achieved and given that capital resources are limited it is critical that the Council makes best use of these resources – including the development of a long term strategic plan to address the identified maintenance and repairs backlog for corporate assets.</p> <p>It is recognised that significant further work is required in this area in order to deliver a robust capital strategy, and the updated Asset Management Plan has been completed in draft following Scrutiny Committee consideration during the year, with an up-to-date stock condition survey. This sets out the detailed capital resources /expenditure required to maintain assets, together with the associated timeframe, to inform options appraisal and feed into the capital strategy for ASSG/CMT review of potential schemes.</p>	<p>management and monitoring of the capital programme with appropriate feedback and challenge – identifying improvements to the future management of the capital programme.</p>
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No	Issue	Previous Action	Update 2023/24
3	<p>Welfare & Benefit Reform</p> <p>There is a risk of reduced income corporately due to welfare reform changes (including council tax support scheme and Universal Credit with further austerity measures from the Welfare reform Act 2015).</p> <p>As well as the potential for reduced income and an increase in bad debts, there are additional impacts arising from increased needs in services – eg., homelessness, requirement for additional support to vulnerable people, increased issues of ASB etc. meaning an increase in demand on 3rd sector and statutory agency services.</p>	<p>Income levels have been largely maintained in 2022/23 (due to the mitigations put in place) despite the effects of the Covid-19 crisis and recent geopolitical issues.</p> <p>The Corporate Working Group has continued to meet to take forward an organisation wide approach including preparations for implementation of the Debt Respite Scheme (Breathing Space).</p> <p>Following a tender process in 2021, further work was being commissioned around corporate debt to secure a one council approach focusing on not only the management of multiple debt households but seeking to understand how resources are better aligned to secure VFM.</p> <p>The work with the Voluntary Sector continues to thrive and baseline statistics have been produced through UK Share Prosperity Fund to understand the Council's approach and underpin projects around identified priority vulnerability areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Exclusion • Financial Exclusion 	<p>Income levels have been largely maintained in 2023/24 (due to the mitigations put in place) despite the effects of the cost of living crisis.</p> <p>Quarterly updates are presented to Cabinet as part of the performance report to monitor economic wellbeing and the impact on Council services including customer demand via monitoring of calls/contacts together with the financial impact of collection and demand for benefits and effect on income streams such as rent, council tax and business rates</p> <p>The Corporate Working Group has continued to meet to take forward an organisation wide approach including preparations for implementation of the Debt Respite Scheme (Breathing Space). Following a tender process in 2021, further work was being commissioned around corporate debt to secure a one council approach focusing on not only the management of multiple debt households but seeking to understand how resources are better aligned to secure VFM.</p> <p>The work with the Voluntary Sector continues to thrive and baseline statistics have been produced through UK Share Prosperity Fund to understand the Council's approach and underpin projects around identified priority vulnerability areas:</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mental Health• Digital Exclusion• Housing and Homelessness <p>The work also includes baseline to produce a Borough Wellbeing Strategy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social Exclusion• Financial Exclusion• Mental Health• Digital Exclusion• Housing and Homelessness <p>The work also includes baseline to produce a Borough Wellbeing Strategy.</p>
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