

By: Ben Watts, General Counsel
To: Governance and Audit Committee – 22nd January 2020
Subject: **REVIEW OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides an update on the work that is planned for the coming months relating to corporate governance.

FOR NOTING

1. Over the past year there have been a number of significant changes to the Council's governance. Improvements have been made to the Council's constitution, learning has been implemented from a range of audit reports and the experiences in other Councils have been reflected in changes to our governance.
2. The General Counsel has worked with the Chairman of the Governance and Audit Committee, the Head of Paid Service, the Corporate Director of Finance and the Head of Internal Audit to discuss and identify future changes to the governance of the Council and the support to this Committee.
3. As part of those changes, the Governance and Audit Committee has appointed an independent Member to support the objectives of the Committee. The Chairman of Governance and Audit, the Head of Internal Audit and the General Counsel have met the new independent Member on a number of occasions in recent weeks and recognise the benefit of his input into a range of planned activities that might otherwise have come to this Committee for approval.
4. The terms of reference for the Governance and Audit Committee are due for review by the General Counsel and the Head of Internal Audit. The annual review of Corporate Governance is also due for completion and report.
5. It is recognised that there is merit in adopting a different approach to both of these activities and specifically involving the new independent Member to benefit from his experience in other authorities. Similarly, the training activity planned before this meeting will provide an opportunity for standing Members of this Committee to provide their thoughts at this iterative stage.
6. It is therefore proposed that the Head of Internal Audit and General Counsel will provide a report on both of these subjects to the next meeting of Governance and Audit Committee having involved Members as indicated at paragraph five above.
7. The General Counsel had also committed to provide an update to Members in relation to the Annual Governance Statement for 2020. Members will recall that this was to look at the process adopted by officers to build the assurance statement that is signed by the Leader and statutory officers as part of the publication of the annual accounts.

8. The Head of Internal Audit has shared an approach that he used in other authorities and discussed the benefits of that different way of gathering information to build the Annual Governance Statement. This is being added to the elements that have served us well in recent years to improve our AGS that Members of this Committee will receive in July 2020. The General Counsel and the Head of Internal Audit are now working with statutory officers on finalising the process before discussing with Corporate Management Team and subsequently issuing.

Recommendations

9. It is recommended that Members **NOTE** the activities that are ongoing to improve the Council's governance.