

Annual Governance Statement

for year ended 31 March 2021



www.bolsover.gov.uk

Bolsover
District Council

Foreword

“To become a dynamic, self-sufficient and flexible Council that delivers excellent services, whilst adapting to local aspirations and acting as the economic and environmental driver for Bolsover District.”

This is the Council’s Ambition for 2020-2024 and it has been developed as an alternative to a Council Plan and is a series of ambitions.

The Ambition is flexible and adaptable. It has the scope for new projects to be delivered whilst having the preparedness to address uncertainties such as reductions in funding and income we receive, changes in legislation that affect our services or influences that affect our local communities and their way of life.

Bolsover District Council is a publicly funded bureaucracy and the projects we implement to help us achieve this ambition must and will be subject to revision, scrutiny and audit as we continue to respond to the changing needs of our District.

This Annual Governance Statement assesses the corporate governance arrangements we had in place during 2020-21 and the changes we had to make to those arrangements in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Also included is our assessment of how our financial management arrangements comply with the new CIPFA financial management code.



Lee Hickin
**Director of Corporate Resources
(Head of Paid Service)**

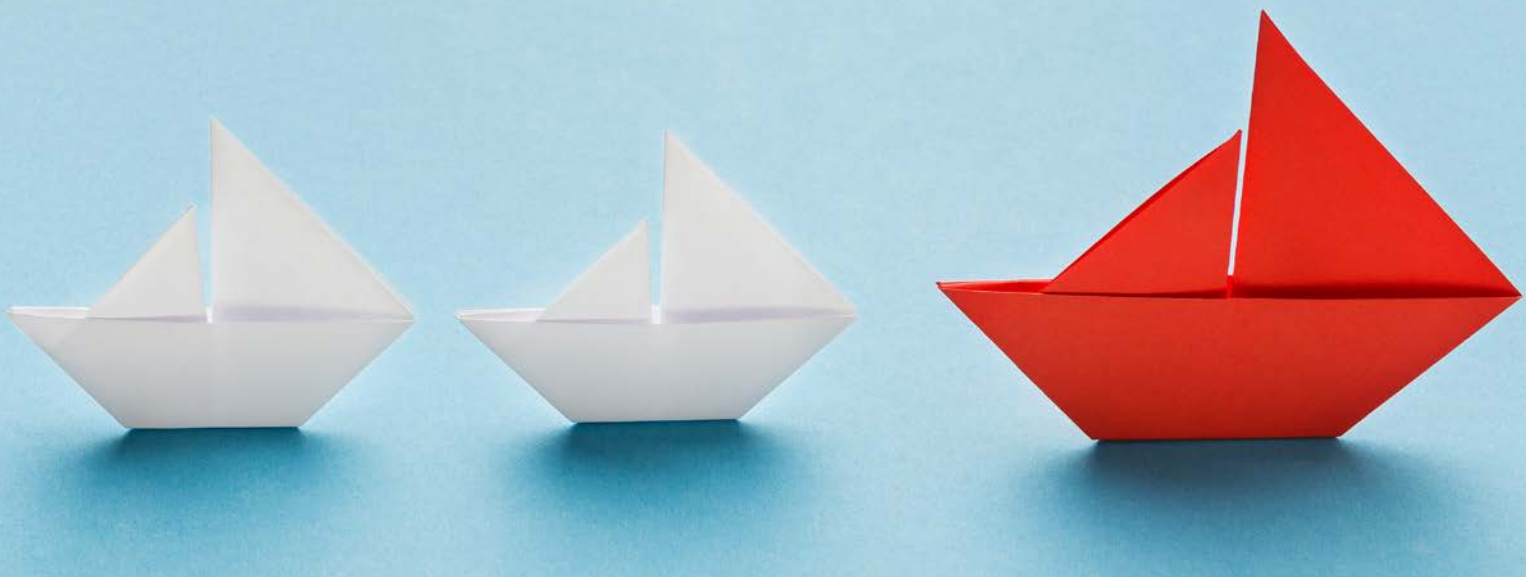


Steve Fritchley
Leader

What is Corporate Governance?

Corporate governance is the combination of rules, practices and processes by which organisations are directed, regulated and controlled. It is also about culture, values and ethics. It is the way that councillors and employees act.

The Council's corporate governance arrangements aim to ensure that it does the right things in the right way for the right people in a way that is timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable.



The Annual Governance Statement

Bolsover District Council has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance which is consistent with the principles of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) - the 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework' 2016 edition.

This statement explains how the Council has complied with the code for the year ended 31 March 2021 and also how it meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015.

1. The Council's Governance Responsibilities

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

The Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper

arrangements for the governance of its affairs and for facilitating the effective exercise of its functions. This includes arrangements for the management of risk.

The Council's Governance Code, which was renewed in accordance with the new governance guidance produced by CIPFA and SOLACE, states the importance to the Council of good corporate governance and sets out its commitment to the principles involved. The Code can be obtained from the Monitoring Officer.

Governance and Partnerships

In addition to giving appropriate consideration to the Council's internal governance arrangements, it needs to be recognised that the Council is working in a number of partnership arrangements.

Since April 2011, the Council has operated a Strategic Alliance with North East Derbyshire District Council, a neighbouring authority.

The two Councils share some of the senior management posts. Wherever possible the Strategic Management Team meets together to discuss issues affecting both Councils and separately where an issue affects only one Council. There is a substantial amount of joint working across the services including Environmental Health which

is a fully shared service hosted by North East Derbyshire District Council.

In addition, we have joint arrangements with Chesterfield Borough Council, Derbyshire Dales District Council and Gedling Borough Council.

We have a Local Strategic Partnership which engages with a range of local partners including NHS bodies. We also actively participate in the D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership.

Where the Council has entered into partnership arrangements it seeks to ensure that they are subject to appropriate governance management arrangements.

2. The Purpose of the Governance Framework

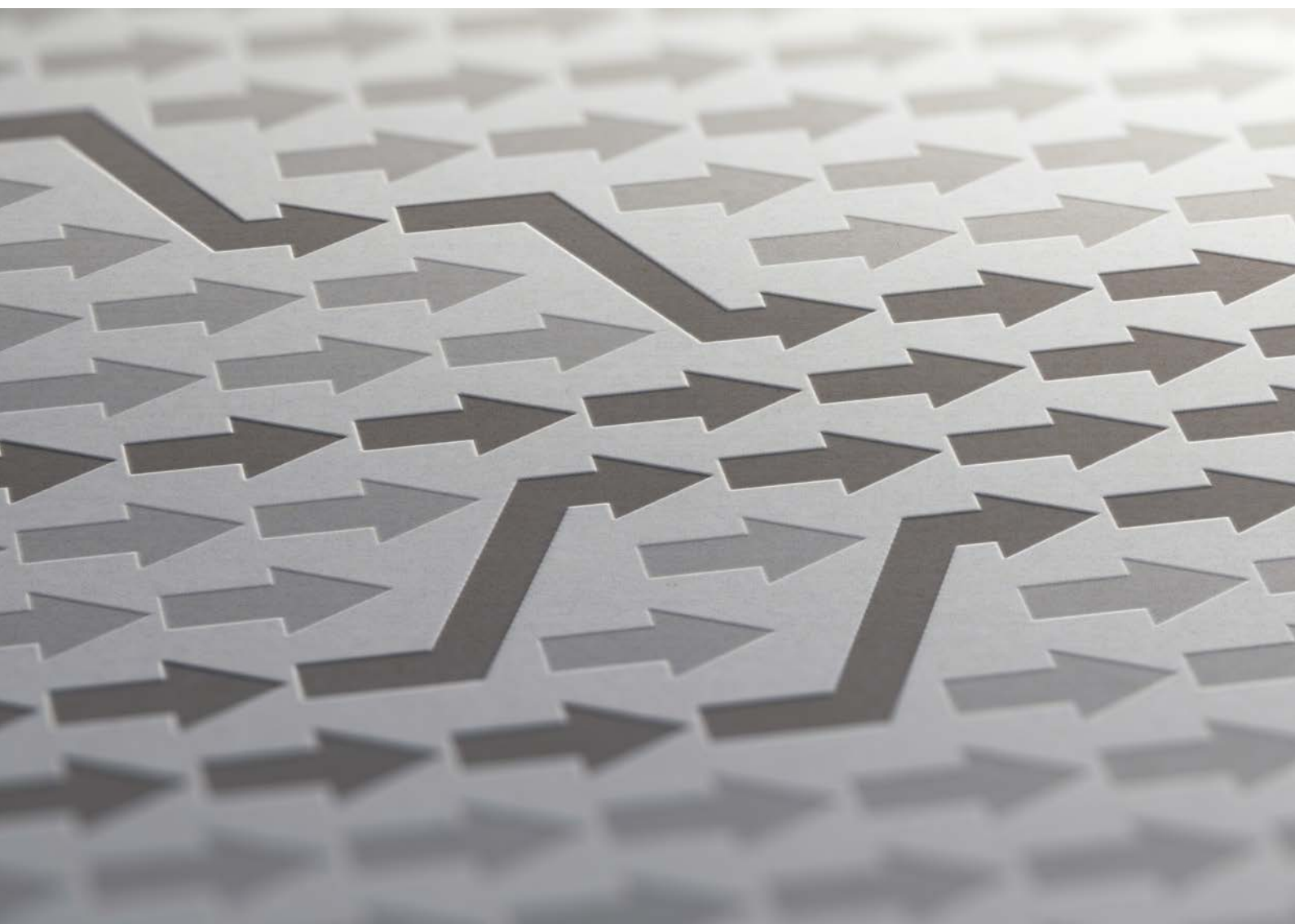
The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled, together with those activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the local community.

It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate cost effective services.

In order to review the effectiveness of the governance framework, assurances are provided to, and challenged by, the Audit Committee, Scrutiny Committees, Executive or Council as appropriate.

Some of the key elements of the governance framework are highlighted on the next pages.

The system of internal control is a significant part of the governance framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.



Purpose: To become a dynamic, self-sufficient and flexible Council that delivers excellent services, whilst adapting to local aspirations and acting as the economic and environmental driver for Bolsover District.

Governance Code

Assurance Required on:

- Delivery of Corporate Plan/Council Ambition
- Communication of performance
- Financial management
- Service quality and best use of resources
- Any failures in service delivery addressed effectively
- Councillors and officers working together effectively
- Compliance with laws and regulations, policies and procedures
- High standards of conduct and behaviour
- Informed and transparent decision making
- Management of risk and effective internal controls
- Developing the capacity and capability of members and employees
- Democratic engagement and robust public accountability

Sources of Assurance:

- Community Strategy
- Planning principles for services
- Constitution
- Strategic Leadership and Senior Management structures
- Medium Term Financial Plan
- Financial Procedure Rules
- Contract Procedure Rules
- Procurement Strategy
- Consultation and Engagement Strategy
- Single Equality Scheme
- Organisational Development and Workforce Strategy
- Information Management Strategy
- ICT & Digital Strategy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Risk Management Strategy
- Partnership Working
- Internal & External Audit and inspection
- Counter Fraud Strategy and Policy & Procedures
- Audit and Standards committees
- Codes of Conduct (Employees and Members)



Sources of Assurance (continued)

- Whistleblowing Policy
- Performance Review and Development
- Complaints system
- Member Development Programme

Assurances Received:

- Statement of Accounts
- External Audit and Inspection reporting
- Internal Audit reporting
- Risk and Control Registers and Risk Management Reporting
- Chief Officers' Internal Control Assurances
- Counter Fraud Annual Report
- Scrutiny Reviews
- Reviews commissioned by management
- Annual review of the Constitution
- Peer Reviews
- Ombudsman Reports
- Ongoing review of Corporate Governance and of gaps in assurance
- Quarterly performance reports to Executive

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Address the impact of Covid-19 upon the Council, local economy and community.
- Manage the increased risk of a cyber-security attack in light of new working arrangements including agile working.
- Regular monitoring of the new 'in-house' recycling collections service.
- Ensuring The Council is prepared and informed about the much delayed outcome of the Government's reviews on Local Government Financing.



**Annual
Governance
Statement**



Governance Framework

The Council Ambition

A new Council Ambition 2020-2024 was developed in early 2020. The Ambition replaced the Corporate Plan and it outlined the key areas that the Council would focus on over the following four years.

The Council's overall Ambition is 'to become a dynamic, self-sufficient and flexible Council that delivers excellent services, whilst adapting to local aspirations and acting as the economic and environmental driver for Bolsover District.'

The Ambition sets out three strategic themes - Customers, Economy and Environment. Beneath each of these are a number of priorities which will be considered in the delivery of services.

A suite of performance indicators support the Ambition.

In preparation for the next four years the Leader of the Council invited the Local Government Association to undertake a Peer Review during November 2019.

The feedback from the review was considered when developing the new Council Ambition.

Performance Management

Performance monitoring will be undertaken by the Scrutiny Committees. In addition, Portfolio Holders will meet regularly with officers, Heads of Service and Strategic Directors to ensure effective performance management across the suite of agreed performance indicators supporting the Ambition. Executive and Council will receive an Annual report which identifies key achievements and challenges, celebrates successes and identifies areas of work which require focus over the forthcoming year.

Social Media

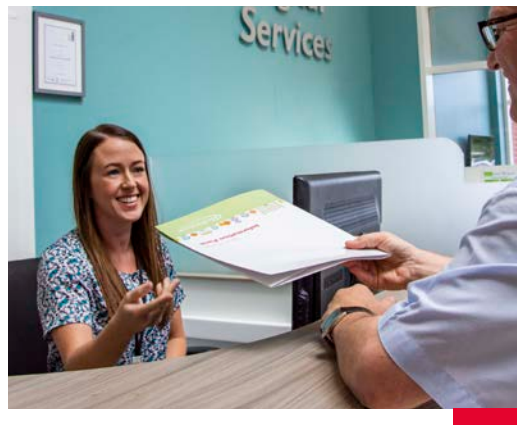
Join the conversation on all aspects of Bolsover District Council services and activities.

The Council provides its customers access to our services and information in the most appropriate Social Media channels.

OUR PRIORITIES

Customers:

- Increasing customer satisfaction with our services
- Improving customer contact and removing barriers to accessing information
- Actively engaging with partners to benefit our customers
- Promoting equality, diversity and supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged people
- Providing good quality council housing where people choose to live
- Improving health, wellbeing and increasing participation in sport and leisure activities



Economy:

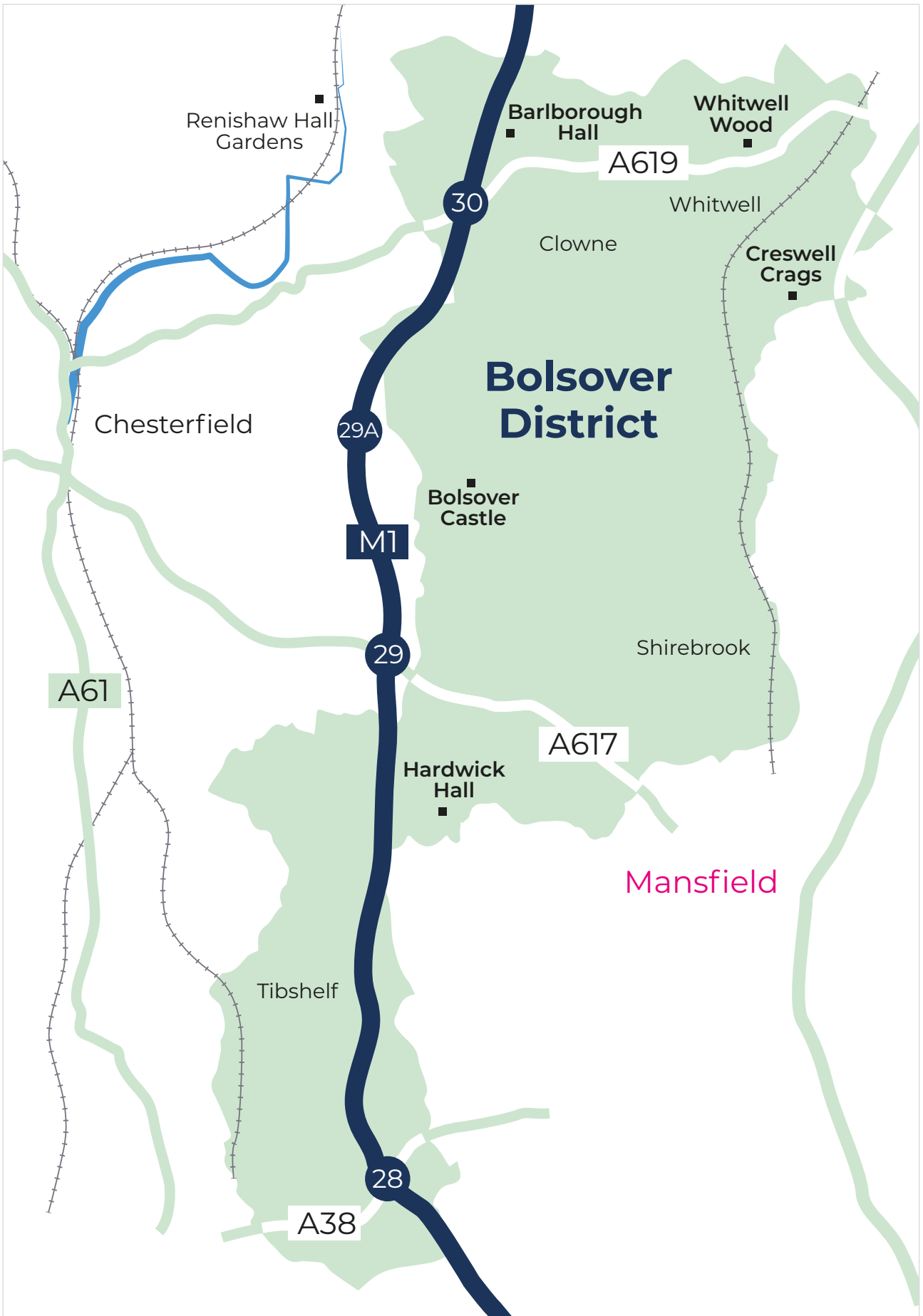
- Working with partners to support enterprise, innovation, jobs and skills
- Unlocking Development Potential: unlocking the capacity of major employment sites
- Enabling Housing Growth: increasing the supply, quality and range of housing to meet the needs of the growing population and support economic growth
- Making the best use of our assets
- Ensuring financial sustainability and increasing revenue streams
- Promoting the District and working with partners to increase tourism



Environment:

- Reducing our carbon footprint whilst supporting and encouraging residents and businesses to do the same
- Increasing recycling
- Ensuring a high standard of environmental cleanliness, undertaking appropriate enforcement activity where required
- Enhancing biodiversity and developing attractive neighbourhoods that residents feel proud of and take responsibility for
- Working with partners to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour
- Actively engaging with partners to benefit our communities





Managing Risk and Opportunities

The Council has a Risk Management Strategy and associated framework in place which has been comprehensively reviewed during 2020-21.

The Council has embedded risk management by the establishment of a Risk Management Group, elected member led and attended by senior officers, internal audit and health and safety.

The group will review at least quarterly all risk registers, offering challenge to the assessment process. The group will lead on the development and review of all risk related policies, plans and strategies across the Council.

The Risk Management framework includes a quarterly reporting process to Audit Committee.

The longer term sustainability of both our service delivery and the Council's financial position are protected by Corporate, Service and Financial Plans which cover a four year period. These are supported by a Risk Management Strategy and associated framework which identifies and mitigates the Strategic and Operational risks which could hinder or prevent our plans being achieved.

Our organisation is risk aware rather than risk averse as the decision whether to accept risk has to be taken in light of the potential benefits of a proposed course of action. The extent to which the Council is risk averse, will undoubtedly impact on its potential to progress available opportunities to secure benefits for local residents.

The Risk Management approach, both in the identification of risks and the

action taken to address the risks, is flexible and has the ability to respond to change. National policies, service delivery arrangements, national and local circumstances, together with Council priorities have and will continue to change and evolve over time. The Council's Risk Management focus and arrangements are able to adjust in order to ensure that current threats and opportunities are effectively addressed and not stifled by inappropriate risk management arrangements.

Although the Council can do much to manage the risks it faces, it does need to be recognised that some of the major Strategic Risks are only partially within its direct influence. Key risks included in the Strategic Risk Register at present are:

STR1

Government Legislation / Parliamentary uncertainty / impact of Brexit / adverse external economic climate has an accelerating impact on Council (poor financial settlement), or upon the local economy, to which Council is unable to adopt an appropriate change of Strategic direction.

STR2

Failure to deliver a balanced budget in line with the MTFP, at a time when the Council's reserves are limited to 'adequate' levels.

STR3

The Council is affected by an operational service failure which has a major impact upon the local community, this impact being reflected in the Council's sustainability

and reputation. Failure could arise from services – incl. Data Protection – failing to adhere to best practice. Resulting in a potential impact upon the Council's ability to secure its corporate objectives. Given the efficiency measures that have been introduced to date this is considered to be an increasing issue for the Council.

STR4

It becomes increasingly difficult to recruit to key posts or to replace key staff who leave (for example Environmental Health Officers). Staff morale is adversely affected as a result of pace of change, tightening financial circumstances or external circumstances.

STR5

Delivery of the Council's Agenda is dependent upon effective delivery of both a number of major initiatives / projects and implementing a range of new government reforms whilst maintaining service quality, which may overstretch our reduced organisational capacity.

STR6

Emergency Planning and Business Continuity arrangements fail to meet required standards when tested by flu pandemic, natural disaster (flood), etc.

The Council is exposed to cyber-crime with a loss of data / systems resulting in a potential inability to provide core services and incurring reputational damage.

STR7

Lack of strategic direction from Members / Corporate Management, external partners change Strategic direction.

STR8

Governance Arrangements including Performance, Finance and Risk Management need to be maintained in order to continue to operate effectively in a rapidly changing environment.

STR9

HS2 - Without considerable environmental mitigation measures, HS2 will have a significant impact on the visual amenity of the district, disruption to businesses, home owners and communities.

STR10

Failure to have in place robust, comprehensive and up to date policies and procedures for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

STR11

Failure to address the impact of COVID-19 upon the organisation, local economy and community.

STR12

Cyber security attack which severely impacts ICT systems and data. E.g. Ransomware attack rendering access to ICT unavailable for some time.



Decision Making and Responsibilities

The Council consists of 37 elected members, with an Executive of lead members who are supported and held to account by three scrutiny committees.

The Council has a formal Constitution in place which sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures for ensuring that the Council is efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. It contains the basic rules governing the Council's business, and a section on responsibility for functions, which includes a list of functions which may be exercised by officers. It also contains the rules, protocols and codes of practice under which the Council, its members and officers operate. The Constitution is usually reviewed annually and a new version issued. As the Annual Meeting was cancelled, no new version of the Constitution was issued in 2020. The review continued and will be reflected in the 2021 version.

In March 2020 the Council approved a report implementing a new management structure. This provided for the disestablishment of the Chief Executive Office post and for a review of future Senior Management arrangements after 6 months. This review was partially carried out and it was confirmed that the Council should continue without a Chief Executive Officer.

Open Decision-making

All Council meetings since May 2019 can be viewed on www.bolsover.tv

Also, meetings of the Council, Executive and the main Committees are open to the public except where exempt or confidential matters are being discussed, and all reports considered and the minutes of decisions taken are, unless confidential, made available on the Council's website.

The Council's Forward Plan contains information about matters that are likely to be the subject of a decision taken by Executive during the forthcoming four months.

The rest of the review into the Senior Management Structure has been delayed by the Covid 19 Pandemic and the need to assist the community in these difficult times and to deal with other emergency planning issues related to the Pandemic. The Senior Management Review is now nearing a conclusion in 2021/22.

The Constitution is available on the Council's website and is reviewed annually through Standards Committee and Annual Council.

The Constitution sets out the functions of key governance officers, including the statutory posts of 'Head of Paid Service' (Director of Corporate Resources), 'Monitoring Officer' (Head of Corporate Governance) and 'Section 151 Officer' (Head of Finance and Resources) and explains the role of these officers in ensuring that processes are in place for enabling the Council to meet its statutory obligations and also for providing advice to members, officers and committees on staff management, financial, legal and ethical governance issues.

As a result of the Pandemic and temporary Regulations temporarily allowing this, Member meetings were held virtually for most of the year. This worked well and ensured that all meetings could still be viewed by the public. This included a Scrutiny Call In of an Executive item. In addition, temporary emergency delegations were put in place to ensure that the Council's business could be continued.





Equality

The Council is committed to delivering equality and improving the quality of life for the people of Bolsover District Council. Our Single Equality Scheme and Equality Policy for service delivery clearly sets out that no person should be treated unfairly and commits the Council to eliminating all forms of discrimination, advancing equality and fostering good relations between all groups in society.

Any new Council policy, proposal or service, or any change to these that affects people must be the subject of an Equality Impact Assessment to ensure that equality issues have been consciously considered throughout the decision making processes.

Financial Management

The Chief Financial Officer is responsible for the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs, as required by Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972, and our financial management arrangements are compliant with the governance requirements set out in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's 'Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government' (2016). The Council's Chief Financial Officer is a full member of the Strategic Management Team and is supported by appropriately qualified and experienced staff.

Internal financial control is based on a framework of management information that includes the Financial Regulations, Contract and Procurement Procedure Rules, our accounting procedures and key financial systems. These include established budget planning procedures and quarterly budget reports to Scrutiny Committee and Executive.

The Medium Term Financial Plan sets out the Council's strategic approach to the management of its finances and outlines some of the financial issues that we will face over the next four years.

Despite our established success in delivering savings, the Council faces the challenge of designing a sustainable budget for the future in the face of continuing changes to our income from Government funding. We have developed a Transformation

Programme to improve efficiency and reshape our services whilst maintaining our commitment to the most vulnerable. This involves taking a fundamental look at all areas of the Council's work considering different ways of delivering services and working more effectively with other organisations.

The Council's Transformation Programme has, to date, delivered year on year revenue improvements in the region of £0.800m. That's 80% of the £1m target by 2022. Further revenue improvements have also been identified through seven strategic projects. In addition, each service area has been subject to a comprehensive service review process identifying, amongst other things, mitigating action should budget reduction be required in future. This allows the Senior Management Team and elected members to consider the impact and actions required in order to obtain further budget reductions from across the organisation, should it be required.

The Financial Management Code

In December 2019, Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), published its financial management code (FM code) to provide guidance for good and sustainable financial management in local authorities.

Local Authorities were originally required to apply the requirements of the FM code with effect from 1 April 2020, all be it a shadow year with the first full year of compliance being 2021/22.

Pressures caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have meant CIPFA has concluded that while the first full year of compliance can remain as 2021/22, it can do so within a more flexible framework where a proportionate approach is encouraged.

During September 2020, the Council's Internal Audit Consortium carried out an audit to ascertain the levels

of compliance within the Council and identify any gaps to enable full implementation.

The audit concluded that the Council complied with the majority of the FM code requirements already. Three recommendations were raised which are being implemented during 2021/22.

Procurement of Goods and Services

Strategic procurement is a series of activities and processes that sits at the heart of the Council, providing the framework by which the Council obtains value for money in all of the goods and services that it procures.

The Council's Procurement Strategy is in the approval process as it has been updated recently.

The strategy outlines how the procurement of goods and services is achieved and describes the Council's Contract Procurement Rules which

form part of the Council's Financial Regulations.



Managing Information

Information is central to the Council and its decision making processes and it therefore needs to be accurate and accessible to those who need it at the time and place that is required. The Council also recognises that it has a responsibility to safeguard the information it holds and to manage it with care and accountability.

The Council complies with the Transparency Agenda, Freedom of Information obligations and the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation regarding the collection, use and transfer of personal data with an appropriately qualified

and experienced Data Protection Officer in post.

To support these high standards of openness and probity the Council has in place an effective complaints policy.

Freedom of Information

Details of how to access information held by the Council and its Freedom of Information policy are available on the Council's website at www.bolsover.gov.uk

Assurance from Internal and External Audit

The Council's external auditor is Mazars LLP. In accordance with their statutory requirements, their annual audit includes examining and certifying whether the financial statements are 'true and fair', and assessing our arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources. In 2019 the External Auditor gave an unqualified audit opinion on both the financial statements and the use of resources.

The Council's Internal Audit function is provided on a consortium basis and includes two other Councils.

The Internal Audit service is a key means of assurance. It is responsible for reviewing the adequacy of the controls throughout all areas of the Council and is compliant with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS).

The Audit Committee approve the Internal Audit Charter, which sets out the Internal Audit role and its responsibilities and clarifies its independence, and the planned audit coverage.

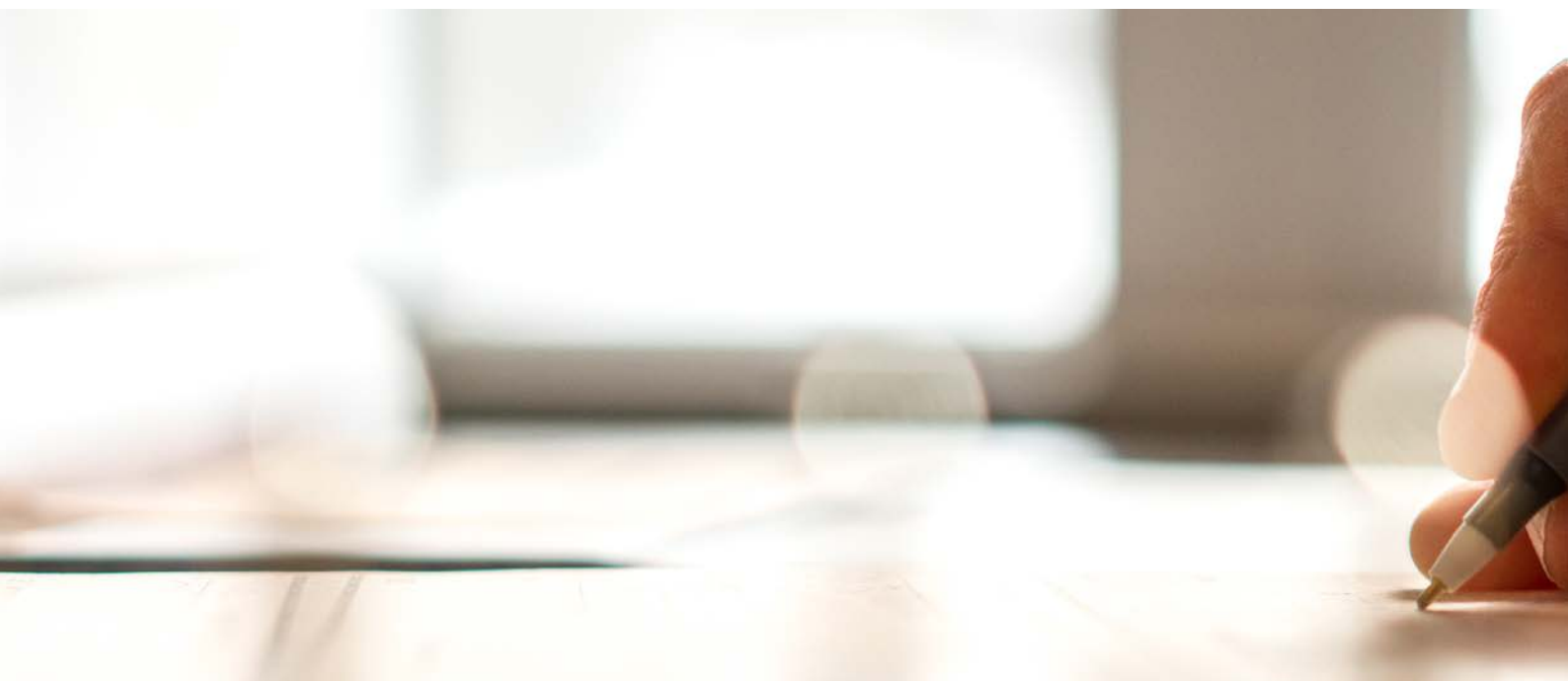
Internal Audit is independently managed by the Internal Audit Consortium Manager.

The Internal Audit Consortium Manager's annual opinion as to the effectiveness of the Council's internal control environment for 2020-21 was:

"In my opinion reasonable assurance can be provided on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the council's framework for governance, risk management and control for the year ended 2020/21.

Although COVID-19 has meant that less internal audit work has been completed than usual during the year, in my opinion, sufficient work has been completed and assurances ascertained to be able to provide an unlimited opinion on the systems of governance, risk management and control in place.

Assurance can never be absolute. In this context 'reasonable assurance' means that arrangements are in place to manage key risks and to meet good governance principles, but there are some areas where improvements are required."



The **Audit Committee** provides independent assurance of the adequacy of the risk management framework and the associated control environment, independent scrutiny of the Council's financial and non-financial performance to the extent that it affects the Council's exposure to risk and weakens the control environment. It is a statutory requirement and consists of six Councillors appointed annually on a politically balanced basis by the Council and one co-opted member appointed by the Council.

Its main functions include:

- Agreeing the Annual Governance Statement and the Annual Statement of Accounts

- Overseeing Internal Audit's independence, objectivity, performance and professionalism and supporting the effectiveness of Internal Audit
- Considering the effectiveness of Risk Management, including the risks of bribery, fraud and corruption
- Considering the reports of External Auditors and Inspectors.

The Audit Committee's effectiveness is reviewed on an annual basis utilising CIPFA's self-assessment of good practice, specifically aimed at Audit Committees.



Conduct

Our Codes of Conduct for members and for Employees set out the standards of conduct and behaviour that are required. They are regularly reviewed and updated as necessary and both groups are regularly reminded of the requirements.

The Local Government Association produced a model Code of Conduct following the Committee for Standards in Public Life's review of Local Government ethical framework. This was presented to Standards

Committee and will be turned into a Bolsover District Council draft for a future Standards Committee.

The code of conduct training this year was done as part of a midterm Induction refresh.

These include the need for members to register personal interests and the requirements for employees and members concerning gifts and hospitality, and outside commitments.

Whistleblowing

People who work for or with the Council are often the first to realise that there may be something wrong within the Council. However, they may feel unable to express their concerns for various reasons, including the fear of victimisation.

The Council has a Whistleblowing Policy that advises staff and others

who work for the Council how to raise concerns about activities in the workplace. The Whistleblowing policy is reviewed annually by the Standards Committee who also consider any entries on the whistleblowing register for the preceding 12 months. Full details are provided on the Council's website at www.bolsover.gov.uk

Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption

We recognise that as well as causing financial loss, fraud and corruption also detrimentally impact service provision and morale, and undermine confidence in the Council's governance and that of public bodies generally.

There is little evidence that the incidence of fraud is currently a major issue for the Council, but the risk is increasing nationally. The Council's policy on Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption is currently being reviewed and updated. A fraud awareness

training session was provided for all elected members during March 2020.

The Council's policy on Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption is being reviewed and updated but has been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a consequence of being low risk, updating the policy has not been prioritised at this time.

Our website tells you how you can report suspected fraud against the Council.

3. Significant Governance Issues

The progress made during 2020-21 on the significant issues identified in our 2019-20 Annual Governance Statement is shown below:

Issue identified	Commentary
<p>1. Improvement in performance of our Environmental Health Service</p>	<p>The Council has recruited a new (Joint) Assistant Director for Environmental Health and completed a fundamental review of the entire service. This included reviews of staffing structures, job descriptions, working arrangements and the use of technology. The Service Level Agreement for the service with North East Derbyshire has been developed and both Councils have invested over £80k each in growth funding. An improvement plan was developed with significant progress made against the actions. This has included major improvements to food safety inspections, animal licensing, enforcement and private sector housing services. The Council(s) continue to ensure the improvements to the Environmental Health Service are effective and sustainable.</p>
<p>2. Opening new communication channels with customers</p>	<p>The priority of improving customer contact and removing barriers to accessing information had the target of ensuring that at least 50% of transactions are made through digital channels by December 2024. When comparing total digital transactions to non-digital channels in the contact centre – 35% are digital at the end of 2020/21.</p>
<p>3. Peer review feedback to be analysed</p>	<p>The feedback report was presented to the Strategic Alliance Management Team and elected members. A new management structure resulted from the findings as did the creation of a number of Bolsover only posts. The Environmental Health Service was a significant focus of the peer review and is discussed above. The creation of a formal Medium Term Financial Strategy rather than plan was highlighted and this will be achieved as part of introducing the FM code.</p>
<p>4. Anti-fraud and Corruption Strategy requires updating</p>	<p>Delayed due to Covid-19 pandemic as updating the policy was prioritised as being low risk to the Council.</p>

Based on our review of the governance framework, the following significant issues will be addressed in 2021-22:

	Issue identified	Commentary
1.	Address the impact of Covid-19 upon the Council, local economy and community using the Council's recovery action plan.	
2.	To put in place arrangements to manage the increased risk of cyber-security attack which severely impacts ICT systems and data in light of new working arrangements including agile working.	
3.	Regular monitoring of the new 'in-house' recycling collections service.	
4.	Ensuring The Council is prepared and informed about the much delayed outcome of the Government's reviews on Local Government finances including the Fair Funding Review, the future of New Homes Bonus and Business Rates Retention Reform.	

These issues will be supported by a detailed action plan, progress on which will be monitored during 2021-22 and reported to senior management and to the Audit Committee.

No other major changes to the Council's governance framework are planned for 2021-22, but we will continue to review and adapt it so that it continues to support the Council in meeting its challenge and in fulfilling its purpose, and ensure that the framework remains proportionate to the risks that are faced.

Coronavirus Pandemic

The 2020/21 financial year has been a full year dealing with the issues generated by the ongoing pandemic. Three national lockdowns and ongoing restrictions have meant considerable changes have been necessary in a number of our services.

Our leisure facilities and customer contact centres have been closed for long periods over the last 12 months. Equipment was removed to allow social distancing in the leisure centre and screens have been installed in all areas where contact is unavoidable, such as reception and payment counters.

Council property lettings were suspended and visits to resident's homes for anything other than emergency repairs were suspended at certain times in line with government guidelines, to protect the resident and our workforce.

The Council's environmental health service has been heavily involved in carrying out compliance and enforcement activities related to Covid-19 to protect the public as the country and economy started to re-open.

Debt recovery across the Council was suspended during the national lockdowns and until after the customer contact centres re-opened to ensure every opportunity was given to customers to pay their outstanding commitments, before any reminder letters were issued.

Our revenues and benefits section, economic development team and partnership team were all heavily involved in processing and making

payments under the myriad of government financial support schemes introduced for individuals and businesses. Council Tax and Business Rates relief were also administered by the revenues and benefits section.

The table overleaf shows the main sources of financial support the Council received from the Government to support business, individuals and the Council's own additional cost pressures and losses in income due to the pandemic.



	Amount received in 2020/21	Amount paid at 31/3/21
Business support grant funding from Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)	£23.617m for businesses	£19.632m in grants
Test and trace support payment scheme funding from the Department of Health and Social Care	£0.188m for individuals	£0.092m in payments
Council Tax hardship relief from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	£0.780m for individuals	£0.738m for relief against bills
Expanded retail discount from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	£7.800m for businesses	£7.800m for businesses
Emergency funding to cover the Council's extra costs from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	£1.406m	Not applicable
Compensation for the Council's losses for Sales, Fees and Charges	£0.720m	Not applicable
Local Tax losses - business rates from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	£0.177m	Not applicable
Local Tax losses - Council Tax from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	£0.118m	Not applicable

Throughout the year staff continued to work from home in most office based services and hybrid Council meetings were held. These had a combination of remote and socially distanced attendees and were delivered via Zoom.

In readiness for the May elections, preparations were made to ensure all sites being utilised were Covid-secure for staff, voters and candidates.

The health and wellbeing of the District's communities has and will

be for a long time, affected by this outbreak. Not only physical health conditions but the various other factors which impact on overall health such as education, housing, employment etc. These will all play a part in the recovery process. Businesses and employment are crucial to the dynamics of the local economy and it is imperative that the Council has a clear assessment of the economic impact on businesses and employers and that we develop a strategy with others to maintain

business confidence and channel support to where it is needed beyond the business grants and rates relief already provided. As a Council we will continue to engage fully with the wider community, Parish Councils, voluntary sector and partners at all levels in this restoration/recovery challenge. A recovery action plan is in operation that will deal with the recovery process through three distinct themes: Re-establishment of Council Services; Economic, Financial and Business and thirdly Community, Health and Wellbeing.

Assessment of the longer term disruption

Areas to consider:

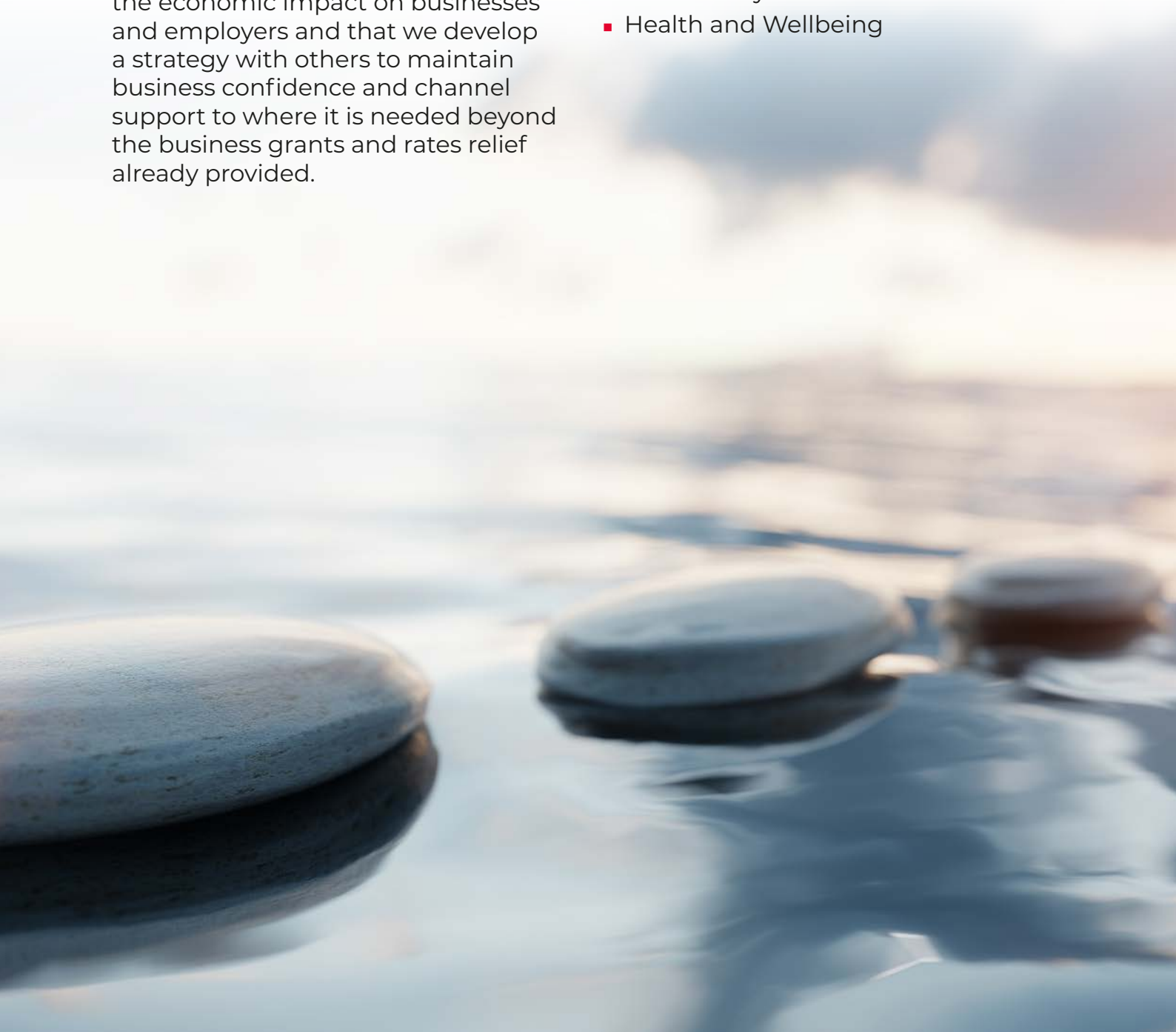
- The loss of income to the Council through closure of its leisure centre and leisure programme in the community, will be substantial as Government support is forecast to end, after quarter 1.
- The loss of income to the Council from renting workspace to business, may be substantial if businesses cannot survive.
- Backlog on services where staff have been diverted to helping the community during the pandemic.
- Levels of arrears after suspending recovery action. Some areas may take longer to recover, if they do at all.
- Post payment checks to be undertaken on business rates grants may mean delays in ongoing changes to businesses accounts for such as valuation reductions if staff aren't available.
- Changes to benefits because of financial difficulties caused by Coronavirus may mean ordinary changes due to circumstances changing are delayed causing overpayments of benefit to occur.
- High demand for ICT projects/ support over the coming years, resolving a backlog of service requests, while supporting the transition to a more agile workforce and digitally accessible council.

Plans for recovery

The health and wellbeing of the District's communities has and will be for a long time, affected by this outbreak. Not only physical health conditions but the various other factors which impact on overall health such as education, housing, employment etc. These will all play a part in the recovery process. Businesses and employment are crucial to the dynamics of the local economy and it is imperative that the Council has a clear assessment of the economic impact on businesses and employers and that we develop a strategy with others to maintain business confidence and channel support to where it is needed beyond the business grants and rates relief already provided.

As a Council we will continue to engage fully with the wider community, Parish Councils, voluntary sector and partners at all levels in this restoration/recovery challenge. A recovery action plan has been developed and is continuing to be implemented. This will deal with the recovery process through three distinct themes:

- Re-establishment of Council Services
- Economic, Financial and Business Community
- Health and Wellbeing



4. Opinion

The Council is satisfied that appropriate governance arrangements are in place and are fit for purpose.

We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the significant governance issues set out above to ensure that our governance arrangements remain robust.

We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Director of Corporate Resources (Head of Paid Service)

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Leader

