

**ROTHERHAM METROPOLITAN  
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Annual Governance Statement  
2020/21**

## **ROTHERHAM MBC ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2020/21**

### **1 SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY**

- 1.1 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (the Council) is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and 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 (the Best Value duty).
- 1.2 In discharging its overall responsibilities, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and ensuring there are effective arrangements in place for the management of risk.
- 1.3 The Council has a Code of Corporate Governance in line with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework: Delivering Good Governance in Local Government. The Code can be found at [www.rotherham.gov.uk](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk)
- 1.4 This Annual Governance Statement meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 in relation to the publication of an Annual Governance Statement.

### **2 THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK**

- 2.1 The Council's general governance arrangements include a range of policies, procedures and activities that are designed to be consistent with the expectations for public sector bodies. They are drawn together by the Council's Code of Corporate Governance which was refreshed and approved by the Audit Committee in November 2020.
- 2.2 Until 31 March 2020, the Council had a Council Plan which was refreshed with new performance measures during each financial year. Due to the delayed council elections caused by the global pandemic, the Council Plan was replaced for the 2020-21 financial year by the "Year Ahead" Plan. This was approved by the Council's Cabinet in September 2020 and originally covered the period until June 2021. In June 2021 the "Year Ahead" Plan was extended until November 2021 to provide an appropriate period of time to develop a new longer-term Council Plan for approval by Council in January 2022. This new Plan will include new priorities for future years and will form the basis of the Council's planning.

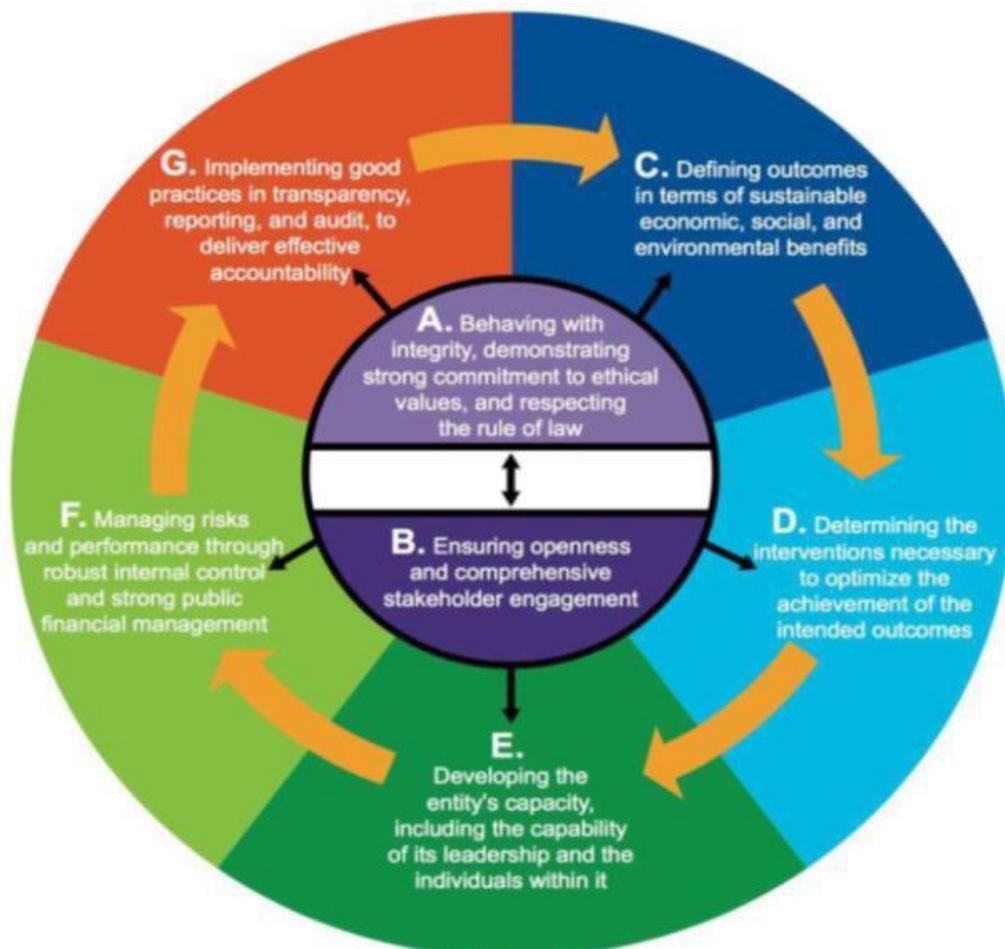
- 2.3 The “Year Ahead” Plan sets out how the Council will work with Rotherham communities, residents and businesses in these uncertain times; providing ongoing support to those who continue to be affected by the pandemic and helping to build resilience as we all adapt to the challenges ahead.
- 2.4 The “Year Ahead” Plan is framed around 5 themes:
- Thriving Neighbourhoods
  - Better Health and Wellbeing
  - Economic Recovery
  - New Ways of Working
  - Hope and Confidence in Rotherham
- 2.5 The plan also includes the following cross-cutting strands, which are integral to each theme:
- Equalities and Social Justice
  - Climate Impact
- 2.6 The governance framework comprises the systems, processes, values and behaviours by which the Council is directed and controlled. It also comprises the activities through which the Council is accountable to, engages with and leads the 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.
- 2.7 The Council also has a system of internal control which 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 provide proportionate and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is designed to:
- identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of Council policies, aims and objectives
  - evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and assess the impact should they be realised, and
  - manage the risks efficiently, effectively, and economically.

2.8 The table below sets out the key elements of an effective governance framework, and how these were delivered in the Council throughout the financial year.

<b>Council Committee or group</b>	<b>Governance Function</b>
Full Council	Endorses the Constitution Approves the policy and financial frameworks Approves the budget and sets council tax
Cabinet	Primary decision-making body of the Council Approves the Council Plan. Comprises the Leader of the Council and Cabinet members who have responsibility for specific areas
Audit Committee	Considers all issues relating to internal and external audit matters Monitors and reviews the effectiveness of risk management systems, including systems of internal control. Oversees financial reporting and financial statements and the annual governance process.
Standards and Ethics Committee	Promotes high standards of conduct by elected members and monitors the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct
Overview and Scrutiny Committees	Reviews and scrutinises the decisions and action taken in connection with any functions of the Council, including "pre-Scrutiny" of some recommendations due to be considered by Cabinet. Make reports or recommendations to the Council or Cabinet with respect to the discharge of any functions of the Council
Chief Executive, Strategic and Assistant Directors	Set governance standards Lead and apply governance standards across the Council
Internal Audit	Performs independent and objective reviews of all areas of the Council Undertakes fraud and irregularity investigations and proactive anti-fraud work
Areas or disciplines which are not directly responsible for delivery of services, for example Performance Management, Risk Management, Finance, HR, Legal, Information Security, Health and Safety.	Responsibilities include designing policies, setting direction and ensuring compliance
Management. Assurance at this level comes directly from those responsible for delivering specific objectives, projects or operational areas.	Responsibilities include identifying risks and improvement actions

### 3 HOW THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK IS APPLIED

3.1 The principles set out in both the CIPFA/SOLACE Delivering Good Governance Guidance and the Council's own Code are shown in the diagram below:



3.2 The table below indicates the detailed governance arrangements in place during the year and their operation, with reference to these principles:

Principle	Arrangements at Rotherham MBC
Principle A - Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law	<p>The Council has a constitution and a supporting set of rules and procedures that govern its activities in accordance with legislative requirements.</p> <p>All key decisions require review by Legal and Financial Services to ensure all relevant requirements and considerations are taken into account.</p> <p>The Council has arrangements for encouraging the reporting of suspected wrong-doing. The Council's Whistle-blowing policy has been revised in line with current national guidance.</p>

	<p>The Council has a Member/Officer Protocol which has been adopted by the Council. It is communicated to all Members and is emphasized through training on the Code of Conduct which forms part of the induction programme for Members and their continuous development programme. Codes of Conduct for Members and Officers define conflicts of interest and how they should be treated.</p> <p>The Code of Conduct, constitution and Whistle-blowing Policy can be found at <a href="http://www.rotherham.gov.uk">www.rotherham.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Principle B – Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.</p>	<p>The Council is committed to openness and acting in the public interest. The new “Year Ahead” Plan which was developed rapidly in response to the Covid pandemic, is available on the Council’s website and all performance reporting against the Plan is presented in public meetings of Cabinet. A new Council Plan and a new Rotherham Plan are currently being developed and plans are in place for consultation with stakeholders as part of the development process.</p> <p>Delivery of the vision in the “Year Ahead” Plan is embedded in day-to-day activities across the Council and is monitored through the performance management arrangements which are underpinned by an established framework.</p> <p>The Council conducts a Residents’ Satisfaction Survey every twelve months, based on the Local Government Association’s national model. The results have been reported through the performance management framework.</p> <p>The Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy was published in 2018, covering the period 2018-2025. The strategy sets out the way in which the Council will work with and listen to its communities. It commits the Council to listening and acting on feedback and working with partners to plan for the future. During 2020/21 this Strategy has continued to become embedded in the Council’s methods of working, especially through the Covid pandemic as Neighbourhoods were the cornerstone of the response. As part of this development, a series of regular ward newsletters were continued to improve public awareness of developments in their local areas and improve community engagement.</p> <p>Fortnightly newsletters are also produced for Council members with additional ‘special’ bulletins produced to cover significant issues. These summarise key developments and issues in the Council to enable them to perform their roles effectively.</p> <p>A Consultation and Engagement Policy was developed in 2019. This Policy sets out the Council’s commitment to consult and engage with the public and states that the Council will listen, inform and work in partnership with service users and stakeholders, including their views in the shaping, commissioning and delivery of services wherever possible</p> <p>The Policy is underpinned by a consultation toolkit for services to</p>

	<p>use so that they comply with the Policy. The Rotherham Together Partnership is well established, and partner organisations have an opportunity to provide the Chair role in future years. The Partnership strategy, The Rotherham Plan 2025, was published in early 2017. As noted above, the Rotherham Plan is currently in the process of being updated with the aim that this will be published during 2022.</p>
<p>Principle C - Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.</p>	<p>The Council's five year Council Plan came to an end in March 2020 and the final report on the Plan was published in September 2020. At the same time, a plan was approved for the coming year to cover the period until June 2021. This "Year Ahead" Plan set out the key outcomes that the Council intended to achieve in the coming 12 month period and the Plan has subsequently (in June 2021) been extended until November 2021. The Year Ahead Plan has been monitored throughout the year in line with the Council's Performance Management Framework. This monitoring involves quarterly consideration of the outcomes in public sessions of Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.</p> <p>Sitting alongside the Year Ahead Plan are numerous other strategies which set out more detail around the required outcomes. These include the Rotherham Housing Strategy, Rotherham Economic Growth Plan, Safer Rotherham Strategy, Rotherham Local Plan Core Strategy, Municipal Waste Management Strategy and the Rotherham Health and Wellbeing Strategy.</p> <p>Because of the pandemic, during the 2020-2021 year, Service Plans were not compulsory, although many services still maintained such Plans. However, the Year Ahead Plan captured the priorities and outcomes for services. These were used for Performance Development Reviews for staff. With the development of the extension of the "Year Ahead" Plan and a new Council Plan, the requirement for Service Plans that link to the Council Plan and into individual Personal Development Plans, will be reinstated.</p> <p>In addition to the above, the Council's Risk Management framework links to the relevant plans and enables Strategic and Directorate Leadership Teams to monitor and respond to the risks around each key element of the overall plan that they are accountable for.</p>
<p>Principle D - Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.</p>	<p>As set out above, the Year Ahead Plan and associated Service Plans form the basis for all interventions planned by the Council. All Business decisions are accompanied by a business case and options appraisal and the corporate report templates require information explaining the legal and financial implications of decisions.</p> <p>Delivery of the Plans continues to be monitored through Quarterly Monitoring Reports and the Council has a suite of performance reports which are aligned to the Year Ahead Plan priorities.</p>

	<p>All decisions need to be taken in the context of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, the Capital Programme and the Revenue budget process.</p>
<p>Principle E - Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.</p>	<p>The Council has been working with the Local Government Association to support the development of all councillors, and this will continue in future years. Personal development planning was available to all Members during 2020/21 and take up reached 100% prior to the latest elections in May 2021. A new process has commenced after the elections.</p> <p>The roles of the Leader, the Cabinet, all Members and the Statutory Officers are included in the Constitution.</p> <p>Job descriptions are in place for all posts throughout the Council and these are supported by recruitment and appointment policies and procedures. There is a comprehensive training programme for officers linked to a Workforce Development Plan and the Corporate Workforce Strategy. The strategy aligned with the Council Plan and the new strategy will be developed in tandem with the Council Plan and will be adopted after the Council Plan has been approved. Each Council employee has a Personal Development Plan which will link to their service's Service Plan and is reviewed at regular intervals.</p> <p>A series of projects are in place to deliver service transformational change across the Council as part of the "Big Hearts, Big Changes" programme. These are drawn from the Council Plan and are cross cutting big ticket items. Many of these projects are designed to increase the Council's capability and capacity to meet increased service pressures and adapt to service demands in a "post Covid" environment.</p>
<p>Principle F - Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.</p>	<p>The Council has a Risk Management Policy and Guide which is fully embedded. The Guide was reviewed in Autumn 2021 having last been rewritten in November 2019. This Policy requires the Strategic Risk Register to be reviewed at regular intervals by the Strategic Leadership team and for Directorate and Service level risk registers to be reviewed at least quarterly.</p> <p>Corporate report templates all contain 'risk implications' sections and Risk Management also links closely to Service Plans. The Audit Committee reviews risks and the Risk Management process at every meeting. Performance Reports are aligned to Council Plan priorities and are considered in public and are also linked to the Risk Policy.</p> <p>The Council has an Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy and Strategy which comply with the CIPFA Code of Practice and an Internal Audit function which issues an annual opinion on governance, risk management and internal control. The council also has a Corporate Information Governance Group which is responsible for improving its approach to securing information. This group is supported by a dedicated Information Governance team as well as ongoing monitoring of Data Protection Act / Freedom of</p>

	Information compliance.
Principle G - Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.	<p>The Council's approach to transparency includes the publication on its website of details around budgets and spending, Senior Officer remuneration, Performance Information and reports, the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts and the Annual Governance Statement.</p> <p>The Code of Corporate Governance is refreshed annually in accordance with CIPFA/SOLACE principles and any documents proposed for publication are scrutinised and approved by Strategic Leadership Team, Cabinet and Audit Committee prior to publication.</p> <p>The Head of Internal Audit presents an annual report to Audit Committee to inform members of Internal Audit activity that has taken place during the year. The Audit Committee meets six times a year and receives reports from both Internal and External Audit. In 2019-20 the Audit Committee agreed an update to its Terms of Reference based on CIPFA guidance.</p> <p>The Council is subject to regular inspections from regulatory bodies, including Ofsted, Care Quality Commission etc. The outcomes of these inspections, together with the Council's responses are made available via the website.</p> <p>An appropriate financial control and reporting framework for the Council is in place, with all aspects of revenue and capital spending compared to budget plans being routinely reported throughout the year to the officer Strategic Leadership Team and Cabinet.</p>

### **How is the effectiveness of our Governance Arrangements monitored?**

3.3 The Council reviews the effectiveness of its governance framework, including the system of internal control, every year. The ten key elements of assurance that inform this governance review are:

- 1) The Chief Executive, Strategic and Assistant Directors whose role includes:
  - Corporate oversight and strategic planning
  - Annual corporate governance assessment which is informed by annual Assurance Statements from each Strategic and Assistant Director
  - Implement and monitor regulatory and other governance protocols
  
- 2) Monitoring Officer who has oversight of:
  - Legal and regulatory assurance
  - Monitors the operation of the Constitution
  
- 3) The Section 151 Officer who has oversight of the proper administration of the Councils financial affairs

- 4) Information Governance, which is monitored by:
  - The Designated Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO)
  - Data Protection procedures
  - Information Security and Records Management procedures
- 5) The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, who carry out policy review and challenge as well as have an overview and carry out scrutiny of specific topics
- 6) The Audit Committee which;
  - Reviews the effectiveness of internal and external audit
  - Considers the adequacy of the internal control, risk management and governance arrangements
  - Carries out a Self-assessment
- 7) Internal Audit who produce;
  - An Annual opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal controls, risk management and governance arrangements
  - An Internal Audit plan, reports and action tracking reported to Audit Committee
- 8) External Audit and other external inspections which include:
  - Financial statements audit
  - Value for Money conclusion
  - Care Quality Commission, Ofsted, etc.
- 9) Risk Management which incorporates:
  - A Risk management policy and strategy
  - Quarterly monitoring and reporting of Strategic Risks to Strategic Leadership Team
  - Regular monitoring and reporting of Risk Registers to Directorate Leadership Teams
- 10) Counter Fraud work, which includes:
  - Anti-Fraud and Corruption and Whistleblowing arrangements
  - Anti-Money Laundering Policy and supporting arrangements
  - Codes of Conduct for Officers and Members
  - Financial and Contract Procedure Rules

**What specific assurances does the Council receive about the effectiveness of our Governance Arrangements?**

3.4 The Council receives a number of specific assurances around its governance arrangements from the following:

### **Chief Financial Officer (Section 151 Officer)**

- 3.5 The CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) in Local Government (2016) demands that assurance is provided on a number of governance arrangements relating to the organisation including financial control, reporting, the approach to decision making, compliance with relevant codes and the influence of the CFO within the organisation. These have been considered within the context of this Statement and it has been established that the Council's arrangements conform to the CIPFA requirements and the Section 151 Officer has no significant concerns.

### **Monitoring Officer**

- 3.6 The Monitoring Officer is required to report to the Council in any case where it appears that any proposal, decision or omission by the authority has given rise to or is likely to or would give rise to any contravention of any enactment, rule of law or code of practice or maladministration or injustice in accordance with Sections 5 and 5A of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989; (LGHA 89). These have been considered within the context of this statement and the Monitoring Officer has no significant concerns to report.

### **Internal Audit**

- 3.7 It is a requirement of the UK Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) that there is an annual internal assessment of Internal Audits conformance with the standards, verified externally at least every five years. In late 2020 the external verification was completed. Internal Audit was assessed as generally conforming to Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. This is the highest classification used by CIPFA.
- 3.8 It is also a requirement of PSIAS that an annual report is produced setting out the work performed by Internal Audit and the opinion of the Chief Audit Executive (at Rotherham this is the Head of Internal Audit) on the Council's internal control environment.
- 3.9 The Annual Internal Audit report was presented to the Audit Committee on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2021. The report confirmed positive progress had been made during the year, with 85% of audits resulting in a positive opinion compared with 77% in the previous year. The remaining reports highlighted areas where further improvement could be made but none of these highlighted significant governance or control weaknesses that needed to be reported in the AGS. The areas identified will be followed up

in 2021/22.

- 3.10 During the year, as a result of Covid-19, there were delays in the implementation of audit recommendations with a number of outstanding actions. After prioritisation by the Chief Executive and Strategic Leadership Team this had reduced to a normal level of around 5 by the year end.
- 3.11 Internal Audit concluded that the Council has maintained overall an adequate and effective framework of governance, risk management and control throughout the year, based on internal audit work undertaken throughout the year.
- 3.12 Gold and Tactical Groups were convened to coordinate and oversee the Council's response to the pandemic, ensuring a timely response whilst operating within existing delegations for decision-making. Meetings were minuted and actions logged, and decisions referred to Members as required.
- 3.13 The Gold and Tactical Groups authorised emergency operational measures and decision making in line with the existing Code of Governance and governance arrangements. The emergency measures resulted in changes to procedures and control arrangements. These were subject to audit and found to be well controlled and working well. The Annual Report concluded that the framework of governance, risk management and control was maintained throughout the year.

### **External Audit**

- 3.14 The Council's external auditor is required each year to carry out a statutory audit of the Council's financial statements and give an assessment of the Council's value for money arrangements. Grant Thornton issued an unqualified opinion on the Council's financial statements for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 year on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2020.
- 3.15 In addition, Grant Thornton issued an unqualified conclusion on the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of its resources on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2020. This conclusion stated that the Council had, in all significant respects, proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the financial year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.
- 3.16 Grant Thornton will issue a final ISA 260 report for 2020/21 as well as an opinion on the financial statements and a conclusion on the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness once their work is complete.

## **Compliance with Financial Management Code (FMC)**

- 3.17 The Council complies with the financial management standards as setting out within the CIPFA Financial Management Code (FMC). The Councils Financial Procurement Procedure Rules (FPPR's) provide the bedrock of the Councils financial governance, setting clear principles as to how the Council manages and controls its financial decision making. These FPPR's are routinely reviewed to ensure they are kept up to date with the current financial environment, new financial standards and the ever-changing local authority financial conditions.
- 3.18 The Councils current budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy set out how the Council will finance the current requirements of services, whilst effectively planning for the delivery of agreed savings and continuing to stabilise and improve the Councils level of reserves. However, any significant longer-term planning is hindered by Governments reluctance to provide a financial settlement that is greater than a year ahead.
- 3.19 The Councils capital programme planning and investment levels are directly linked into the revenue budget planning to ensure that any new use of corporate resources is affordable over the longer term, in terms of financing borrowing and major repairs provision charges. Whilst the Council does annually review and make additions to the capital programme, typically with new use of corporate resources, the Council actively looks to maximise its access to and use of, government grant funding and other external contributions. The links between the revenue budget and capital programme are tightly controlled to ensure that the Council sets a Treasury Management Strategy that is both prudent and compliant with the prudential code for capital financial.
- 3.20 The Council sets an annual budget through Cabinet and Council which is then monitored closely during the course of the financial year. The Councils Strategic Leadership team receive monthly updates on the financial position with regular updates taken to cabinet throughout the financial year. This reporting process culminates with a financial outturn report post the end of any financial year, this report sets out how that outturn impacts the future financial planning of the Council, in particular the impact on reserves and delivery of planned savings.

## **4 UPDATE ON MATTERS REFERRED TO IN THE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT FOR 2019/20**

### **Adult Social Care**

- 4.1 Adult Care in 2019/20 continued to develop its key areas of delivery. Engagement with the workforce was initiated to develop a new target

operating model for implementation in October 2019 and this was completed. The service introduced a virtual platform where teams could discuss and share their key activities – Perform Plus, this proved invaluable as they moved into the pandemic where virtual working had to become the norm. However, the embedding of the new operating model was hampered to a degree due to the focus on response to the pandemic but key principles were still introduced.

### **Information Governance**

- 4.2 In last year's Annual Governance Statement, it was reported that the Council has not obtained a Public Services Network (PSN) certificate. Although this continues to be the case this has not had any impact on the business of the Council although there remains a risk that should this continue, the Council's permissions to share confidential data with other organisations could be removed. During the past 12 months significant progress has been achieved with the latest IT system penetration test, conducted by a third party, achieving the highest rating to date. The Council has sent the 2021 submission to the PSN office and is awaiting feedback. Covid-19 has resulted in a delay to all work being carried out by the PSN Office. They have informed the Council that we should receive feedback on the submission in early 2022.
- 4.3 The rate of completion for Freedom of Information Requests and Right of Access Requests continues to improve. The Council is now achieving close to the maximum levels of performance that is realistically achievable. A new tracking system allowing the public to log and monitor their requests will go live within the next few months. This has been delayed by 12 months due to Covid-19 which has required the web team to focus on supporting the community via the website during that time. This change when complete will further improve performance and provide a more customer focused approach to service delivery. Monitoring of performance levels is undertaken monthly by the Corporate Information Governance Group and any areas of concern are addressed immediately either on a corporate or directorate level as appropriate. An annual report is also shared with the Audit Committee.

### **Delivering the Financial Strategy**

- 4.4 The 2021/22 budget was finalised without the requirement for any new budget savings to be identified, however there remains £18m of previously agreed savings to be delivered over a revised profile 2021/22 to 2023/24. £5.7m of these savings are profiled for delivery in 2021/22.
- 4.5 The biggest challenge for the Council remains the cost and demand pressures on social care services and the ability of all services to deliver the service and

cost changes agreed within the budgets. The Council continues to engage with Government regarding funding for Operation Stovewood, further to the one-off funding allocations provided in the last two years (£1.3m for 2019/20 and £2m for 2020/21).

- 4.6 The challenges and risks have been exacerbated by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent circumstances which make it highly likely that the delivery of some of the savings will be further delayed whilst those circumstances remain, especially within social care services. Overall however, the Council has to date effectively managed the financial impact of Covid within the Government grant funding that has been made available. Whilst further Government funding has been provided for 2021/22, the risk remains around the continuing impact of Covid and the balance between financial impact on the Council and compensating Government grant funding.
- 4.7 The uncertainty nationally on the future funding of local government remains. The 2021/22 Finance Settlement was again for one year only and whilst the Spending Review 2021 covers the next three financial years, there is no indication as yet from Government that the 2022/23 Finance Settlement will be for more than one year.

#### **Sub-schemes of delegation**

- 4.8 In 2019/20 Internal Audit reported on the need to develop sub-schemes of delegation. Action has been taken during 2020/21 to produce the sub-schemes in a consistent format. They are now part of the Council Constitution.

### **OTHER SIGNIFICANT ISSUES ARISING DURING 2020/21**

#### **Covid-19**

- 5.1 During the final quarter of the 2019/20 financial year, throughout 2020/21 and to the date of this Statement, the council has had to respond at considerable pace to the COVID-19 pandemic in order to help the residents of the Borough to stay safe and support local businesses and key partners. This response accelerated following the national government's introduction of "lockdown" on 23rd March 2020 and remains a priority to date.
- 5.2 The risk of a pandemic was a long-standing risk on the Council's Strategic Risk Register, along with the need to ensure an appropriate response to emergencies and incidents impacting on business continuity. The Council's Business Continuity Plans for dealing with such an eventuality were already in place prior to "lockdown" and these were activated rapidly during 2019/20 and into the first part of 2020/21. A system of Gold and Tactical command Groups was put in place to ensure operational decision making at pace,

supported by a range of workstreams and a coordinator's group. The Gold and Tactical Groups are part of a clearly defined structure which includes an operational decision-making protocol that sets out which decisions should be taken to which group. Through the Council's Gold structure, decision records were published in relation to changes to services not mandated by Government. The structure is currently being revised and simplified as the Council moves to focus on response and recovery.

- 5.3 There was some minor disruption to the Council's democratic process prior to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020, however during the 2020/21 year Council, committee and other meetings were held via video conferencing technology remotely and Rotherham was the first council in the sub-region to hold a virtual Council meeting. This involved ensuring that meetings were accessible remotely (with support where needed) for all Council Members and that the public could continue to attend those meetings, ensuring ongoing transparency in decision making. Following the lapsing of the legislation that permitted virtual meetings for Council business, "in person" meetings recommenced on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2021 with the Annual Council meeting, which was held with appropriate Covid precautions in place. Since then, all formal meetings of Council Members have been held "in person", although larger venues have had to be used to accommodate social distancing requirements for some meetings.
- 5.4 The need to respond to the pandemic led to several Council services being suspended or reduced. In some cases, this was due to the need to maintain safe methods of working in compliance with legislation and/or Government guidance and in some, due to staff needing to be deployed to manage aspects of the Council's response. Aside from the minimal temporary disruption to the Democratic process mentioned above, the principal impacts on the Council's governance framework relate to Corporate Performance Management, Internal Audit and Corporate Risk Management as set out in the following paragraphs.
- 5.5 The Council had intended to develop a new Council Plan for 2020/2021 after the local elections. As the local elections were postponed until May 2021, the development of the new Plan was also postponed but is now in hand. The final Council Plan performance report for 2019/2020 was reported to Cabinet in September 2020 and as noted in paragraph 2.2 the Council has produced a new plan, the "Year Ahead" plan. This will be in place until November 2021 and, like the Council Plan, progress has been and is reported quarterly. The first report was published in December 2020.
- 5.6 Service Plans for 2020/21 had been intended for completion by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 but, in the light of the emergency response, a decision was made to suspend the completion of updated Service Plans and to focus on the

restart of Council Services and delivery of the Year Ahead Plan. Through the Year Ahead Plan, each Directorate was able to focus on their priorities throughout 2020/21. Mandatory Service Plans will be reintroduced in the latter part of 2021/22 in line with the development of the new Council Plan.

- 5.7 At the start of the initial lockdown, Internal Audit staff were redeployed to support elements of the Council's financial response. These staff were progressively returned to their duties, however some were redeployed again during the second phases of national lockdown however, the impact on the overall Audit programme for 2020/21 has been managed effectively.
- 5.8 Since March, corporate Risk Management activity has focused on the COVID response with each workstream contributing to a Corporate Threat and Risk assessment which is updated at least weekly. Individual Directorates have produced daily update reports assessing their pressures and concerns (risks) and highlighting any "red rated" risks to the Gold command Group. As the response has reduced these reports have been scaled back from daily to twice weekly and, at the time of writing, are produced weekly. These reports have enabled the Council to respond rapidly to emerging risks as the pandemic has developed.
- 5.9 The refocusing of Risk Management activity meant that the normal Corporate Risk Management processes were disrupted during the first national lockdown, with the focus being on rapid management of the emerging threats and risks from the pandemic. However, service and directorate risks along with the risks on the Strategic Risk Register continued to be managed by Directorates during this period, although the progress in addressing individual risks had to be reprioritised to take account of the severity of the risks associated with COVID. The process began to be re-established from late summer 2020 and was fully operational again by end of the calendar year.
- 5.10 One of the most significant risks for the Council from the Covid-19 pandemic is the ongoing financial impact in terms of cost and lost income. Whilst the Council managed the financial impact of Covid in 2020/21 supported by the Government grant funding, the ongoing situation of the pandemic and consequent delays in progressing service transformation and cost reduction plans will continue to impact the 2021/22 budget and beyond. Having said this the latest financial monitoring position for 2021/22 projects the council managing within its overall budget.
- 5.11 The Council's response to COVID-19 remains under constant review with a comprehensive reporting regime maintained.

## **6 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS OR DEVELOPMENTS AFTER YEAR END**

- 6.1 The Council responded to and dealt with the ongoing COVID-19 situation as it has changed during the year. Any relevant developments that have occurred after the year end have been included in the relevant sections.
- 6.2 On 29<sup>th</sup> November 2021 the Health and Safety Executive made the Council aware of an investigation it is undertaking. Due to this being only recently notified any potential governance issue is not known at this point.

## **7 LEADER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE STATEMENT 2020/21**

- 7.1 This Annual Governance Statement fairly reflects the position at Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council during the year and up to the date of signing.
- 7.2 As Leader and Chief Executive, we have been advised on the results of the review of the effectiveness of the Council's governance framework. Our overall assessment is that this Annual Governance Statement is a balanced reflection of the governance environment and the arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.
- 7.3 We are also satisfied that over the remainder of the financial year, the Council will take appropriate steps to address any significant governance issues including the impacts from Covid-19 and we will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.



Signed .....

**Councillor Chris Read,  
Leader, Rotherham MBC  
Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2021**



Signed .....

**Sharon Kemp,  
Chief Executive, Rotherham MBC  
Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2021**