

Leaders introduction

The Annual Governance Statement provides an overall assessment of how Ashford Borough Council meets agreed governance standards. I hope that it will lead to a greater understanding of local government and the way it works.

This year's Statement demonstrates the Council's ongoing commitment to increasing public accountability whilst continuing to deliver services at the highest standard to the borough's residents, businesses and visitors.

Thank you for taking the time to read this latest Annual Governance Statement

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gerry Clarkson', written over a horizontal line.

Councillor Gerry Clarkson, CBE, QFSM, BA (HONS)
Leader of the Council

2019/20 Annual Governance Statement

Scope of responsibility

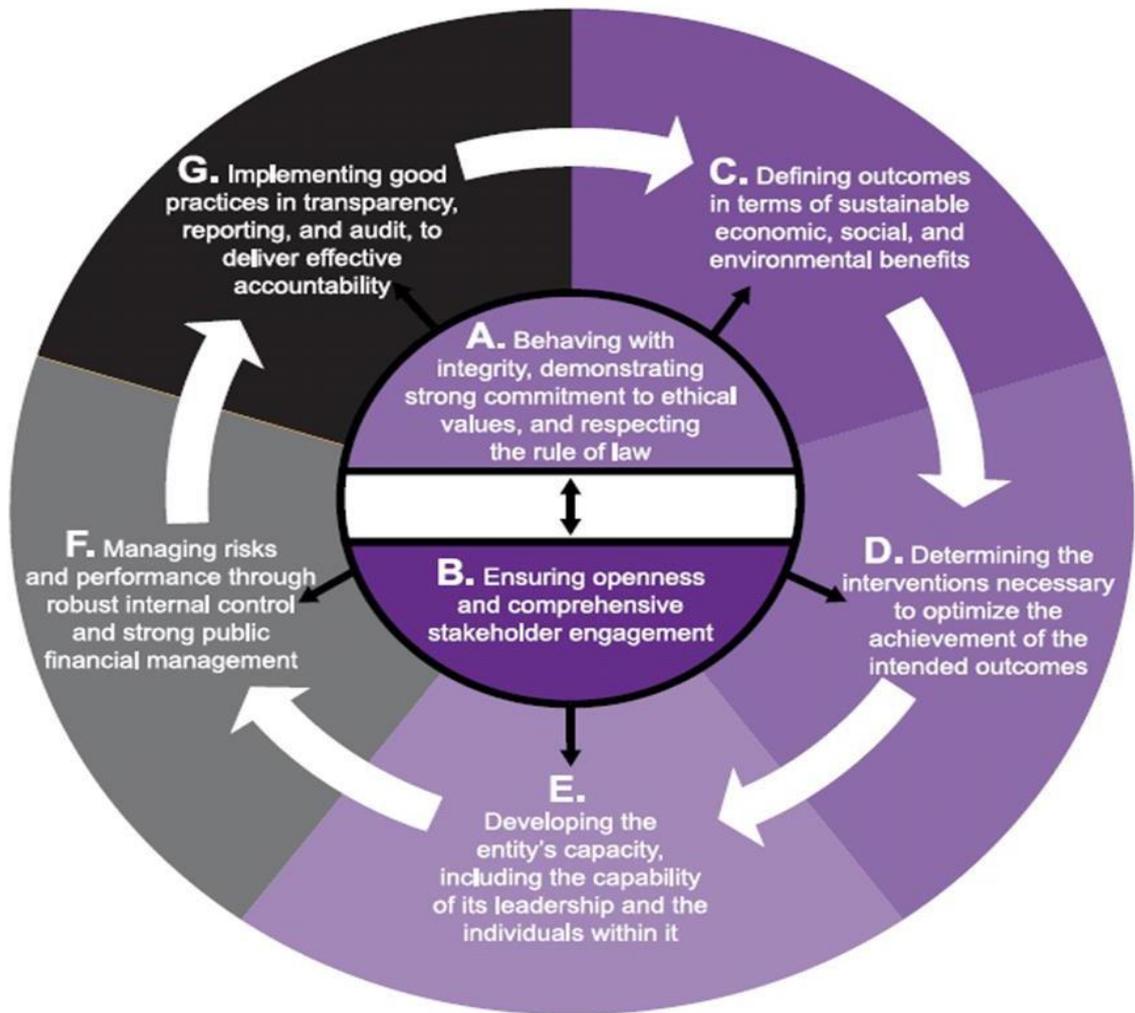
1. Ashford Borough Council is responsible for ensuring its decisions and business are conducted according to the law and proper standards. The council must ensure public money is properly accounted for and that all resources are applied efficiently and effectively in order to secure best value for its residents and taxpayers.
2. The production of an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) is a requirement of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, regulation 6(1). Good governance is fundamental to meeting the council's responsibilities and achieving high levels of service for residents. The Statement explains the effectiveness of the governance arrangements for the year ending 31 March 2020 and sets out any action for planned improvements in the coming year. This statement provides assurance to the council and its stakeholders that good governance arrangements are in place.

The Local Code of Corporate Governance

3. In 2016 the Council adopted an updated [Local Code of Corporate Governance](#), which follows principles contained in national guidance and

produced by CIPFA and SOLACE.

The code sets out seven principles shown in the diagram on the next page:



4. The main principle underpinning this Code is that the council's governance processes and structures focus on delivering sustainable economic, societal, and environmental outcomes.
5. The council meets the principles in the Code through a framework of policies, procedures, behaviours and values. This framework provide Members and officers with effective tools and consistent governance arrangements across the organisation.
6. The diagram makes it clear that good governance is dynamic, and that the council should be committed to continuous improvement.
7. This AGS sets out:
 - a) How the council complies with the principles of good governance set out within the Local Code.
 - b) How the council is dealing with improvement areas identified in last year's AGS.

- c) Any planned changes to the council's governance arrangements for the year ahead (2020/21).

Dealing with last year's key improvements areas

8. The 2018/19 AGS identified three key improvement areas. Progress on remedying these governance exceptions has been reported to the Audit Committee during the year and is set out below:

Consultation

9. Last year's AGS highlighted the need for a more co-ordinated approach to delivering the council's consultations. In response, a draft consultation toolkit has been developed which will shortly be taken to the council's Management Team as part of a suite of actions aimed at improving consultation processes council-wide.
10. The toolkit contains guidance for officers conducting consultations both with the public and in-house such as protocols for good practice and advice for stakeholder selection and engagement.
11. This year, officers have reviewed the council's online consultation presence with the aim of utilising a tool that suits both statutory planning consultations and corporate topics. Having reviewed a number of different software solutions it was found that the council's current system delivered the most benefits but that aspects of the system could be enhanced through development. These developments are planned to take place during 2021/21.

Protocol for Member/Officer relations

12. A Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge review of the council's corporate governance was carried out in 2018. One of the key recommendations made by the review was that a Protocol for an Effective Councillor/Officer Relationships should be considered. During the past year, a new Protocol for an Effective Councillor/Officer Relationship was adopted in April 2019 in accordance with the recommendations of the Peer Review. The new Protocol addresses the areas set out below where it was felt that further information would be of benefit:

- Roles & Responsibilities of Councillors and Officers
- Expectations of Councillors and Officers
- Working Relationships
- Press & Media
- Modelling & Monitoring Positive Behaviours

Development and adoption of social media guidance for Members

13. Following a rise in the number of formal and informal code of conduct complaints during 2018, the Monitoring Officer reviewed the operation of the adopted procedures for complaint handling in the light of our experience and in the light of the suite of recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life regarding Local Government Ethical Standards. In May 2019, the council's Code of Conduct for Councillors was amended to include new provisions on appropriate use of social media. In addition, new social media guidance was adopted to assist Members in complying with the new Code of Conduct provisions and avoid the potential pitfalls in use of social media. It is noteworthy that there has been some reduction in the number of social media complaints since the implementation of the guidance note and it is hoped that this trend will continue.

Development of a culture of cyber security through training, phishing exercises and internal communications campaigns

14. The council has enhanced its Cyber Security measures with a range of initiatives including the traditional technical measures expected. There have been three "Phishing campaigns" with the first across all staff and councillors, followed by two targeted campaigns aimed at Senior Management, councillors and those staff that had fallen for the initial campaign. In addition

15. There has been a poster campaign in the council civic centre to promote staying safe online. In order to continue to promote a culture of cyber security across the council a new suite of Cyber & GDPR e-Learning training will be rolled out during 2020/21 to be completed by all staff, and a specific councillor module for elected Members.

16. To help the council gain a better understanding of the Cyber landscape and issues affecting other public organisations, the IT Manager has attended all five of the NCSP's Cyber Pathfinder Training Seminars, from which we have set up further links to the national Warning Advice and Reporting Point (WARP) and there is a council group on the NCSC's Cyber Security Information Sharing Partnership for the sharing of cyber threat information.

17. Finally, the council takes part in the annual Local Government Association Cyber Stock Take Self-Assessment process through the IT Operations Manager and overseen by the Corporate Information Governance Group (CIGG) which is chaired by the Director of Law and Corporate Governance. During 2018/19 the council scored Amber-Amber, which was the same as most of the other Kent authorities (and the rest of the country). During 2019/20, the council improved its score to Amber-Green. Areas identified for improvement will be overseen by the CIGG.

Principle A – Behaving with Integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

Sources of Assurance

Behaving with Integrity	
	Members' Code of Conduct
	Annual staff performance appraisals
	Declarations of interest made at meetings
	Standards Committee including independent person
	Register of interests & hospitality
	Whistleblowing policy
	Complaints policy
	Open and accessible public meetings
Demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values	
	Constitution
	Staff recruitment, retention policies
	Staff competency framework
	Procurement policy, including social value
	Equalities objectives
Respecting the rule of law	
	Constitution
	Job descriptions for all staff and Portfolio Holders
	Support provided for all committees
	Monitoring Officer
	Committee Terms of Reference
	Cabinet report template
	Anti-Fraud and Corruption policy
	Bribery Act 2010 Policy Statement
	Anti-Money Laundering Policy

Behaving with integrity

18. All agendas for council meetings seek declarations of interest and the type of interest. Ad hoc advice on interests is regularly sought from the Monitoring Officer and his staff by borough Councillors and parish clerks/councillors. This demonstrates a good level of understanding and a culture of compliance with the code of conduct in relation to interests.
19. All new staff and Members receive induction and training upon arrival. For staff, the induction pack includes both a copy of the staff Code of Conduct, and the council's customer service values. These, as part of an overarching customer care

policy, were updated during the year.

Demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values

20. The council has adopted corporate values – Ambitious, Creative and Trustworthy that are embedded into the council’s governance framework. For example, they are incorporated into the recruitment and appraisals processes and are categories at the annual staff awards ceremony.
21. The annual appraisal process is also based on a ‘Competency Framework’ which sets out key behaviours that if demonstrated by staff will contribute to the success of the council’s long term aspirations. Key agreed competencies include:
 - a) Inspiring trust by demonstrating honesty and integrity
 - b) Treating others with respect and dignity at all times, ensuring that there is no discrimination regardless of background.
22. The corporate training programme reflects the council’s strong commitment to ethical values with topics in the 2019/20 programme including ‘Sustainability Friends’, a course aimed at raising awareness about actions staff can take to contribute towards the council’s target of becoming a Carbon Neutral borough by 2030. In addition, a programme of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training has been commissioned for completion by all staff during the last quarter of 2019/21.
23. The council holds an annual Workplace Wellness Week with a programme of events and initiatives such as fresh fruit and nutrition, mental health and financial health workshops, bike checks and lunchtime runs. The staff-run ‘Onion Club’ has further enhanced staff engagement and wellbeing opportunities. Examples of the diverse range of clubs on offer include book, film, knitting, running and walking and art clubs.

Respecting the rule of the law

24. As a statutory body the council’s structures for decision-making, its rules and its processes are influenced by legislation and associated regulation. A fundamental part of our governance, therefore, is the Constitution.
25. The Constitution is a legal requirement and sets out how the council runs, how it makes decisions and the guidance to be followed. Some of these processes are needed by law, while others are chosen by the council.
26. It has several chapters, which set out the basic rules governing the council’s business. More detailed procedures and codes of practice are set out in accompanying rules and protocols.

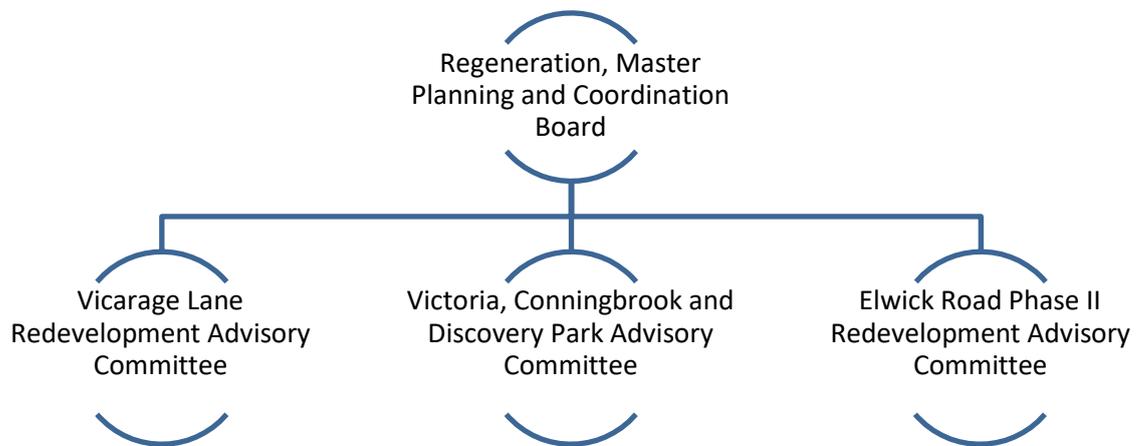
27. Parts of the Constitution are periodically reviewed and changes made to ensure arrangements assist the council in achieving its ambitions and its responsibilities to its residents and taxpayers.
28. The template used for committee reports provides for legal implications of potential decisions to be fully set out and considered.
29. The council has clear policies for dealing with breaches of legal and regulatory duties effectively. For example, in accordance the General Data Protection (GDPR) Act, the council has in place a Breach Management Policy and has trained all staff on how to respond in the event of a breach to ensure compliance with the law. Similarly protocols are in place that respond to the council is meeting its obligations set out in the Health and Safety at Work Act. An audit of the council's implementation of GDPR in July 10 was found to be 'sound'.
30. The council has Contract Standing Orders (CSOs) which is an internal document detailing the rules and regulations relating to the procurement of Works, Goods (Supplies) and Services. The last comprehensive review of the CSOs took place in 2015 and therefore a further review is now required to amend the financial thresholds, review delegations and update the document in line with current legislation.

Key improvement area identified	Review the Contract Standing Orders and ensure changes made are rigorously communicated to staff to ensure officer are using the up-to-date guidance.
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The principal features of the Constitution



32. A variety of Boards, working groups and advisory committees covering different topics are constituted each year to deliver the business of the council to the benefit of residents and stakeholders.
33. All boards, committees and groups have clear objectives which are set out in their terms of reference and reviewed annually. At the beginning of 2019/20, new groups to reflect the council's ambitions and priority projects were approved by the Cabinet including the Regeneration, Masterplanning and Project Co-Ordination Board which now oversees a number of Advisory Committees as set out in the diagram below:



34. As with all council committees, the new board and its advisory committees will be reviewed towards the end of 2019/20 to ensure they provide the right governance arrangements to continue to deliver the council's ambitious plans.

Principle B – Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Sources of Assurance

Openness	
	Annual Report
	Council tax information available online
	Corporate Plan setting goals
	Sustainable Community Strategy
	Residents' Survey (2020)
	Quarterly Resident's magazine
	Consultation portal
Engaging comprehensively with institutional stakeholders	
	Communications Strategy
Engaging stakeholder effectively, including individual citizens and service users	
	Communications Strategy

Other Sources of Assurance

Openness

35. The council adopted Corporate Plan, "The Five Year Corporate Plan – for Aspiration, Action and Achievement 2015-2020", sets out the council's ambitions across four priority areas.
36. The Corporate Plan is publicly available on the council's website is subject to regular scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – primarily through quarterly performance reports.
37. As the current Corporate Plan is nearing the end of its lifespan the council has been developing a new Plan over the past year that will to articulate its ambitions and the action it will take up to 2025. The council is in the process of carrying out extensive consultation to develop its new Plan before its planned adoption in September 2020.
38. An [Annual Report](#) is produced each year to keep residents, partners and stakeholders informed of performance against council priorities during the year.
39. All Member decisions across the formal and democratic decision-making process are published under statutory requirements. There is a presumption that information and decisions are taken in public, but occasionally (under Access to Information Regulations) some information is regarded as 'exempt' and not published. However, the council aims as far as is possible, to keep this type of information and decisions to a minimum.

40. The agendas, minutes and background papers of all committees (other than those which are exempt) are published on the council's website using the Modern.Gov meeting management system. The system is also used for recording officer decisions and Management Team minutes and agendas.
41. Other developments over the past year on Modern.Gov include the Member's online library. This online space provides a dedicated area for all useful information such as training slides and documents, a meeting calendar and other useful information.
42. For staff, various internal communications are used to promote awareness of the council's overarching priorities, including the online monthly staff magazine, Root and Branch, and the Chief Executive's periodic 'walk about' briefings.

Engaging comprehensively with institutional stakeholders

43. The Ashford Strategic Delivery Board includes local partners to ensure the effective and timely delivery of key projects known as the 'Big 8'. Having made such good progress on the 'Big 8' projects that the Board had overseen for the past four years, a new suite of 'Big 8' projects was presented by the Leader of the council meeting of the Board in July 2019.
44. Quarterly update reports are received on progress towards delivery of these projects and the partners work together to address any barriers to progress as and when they emerge. The Board has been instrumental in helping to achieve the successful delivery over the past year of major projects including Ashford International Signalling, Junction 10a of the M20 and the Designer Outlet.
45. The Board is supported by a Strategic Co-ordination Team whose membership comprises high-level officers from the council and stakeholder organisations.
46. Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council work in accordance with an agreed 'District Deal' which is unique within the county. The Deal, is a statement of the two councils shared commitment to work together to deliver better quality outcomes for residents.
47. The council is also an active member of the Ashford Health and Wellbeing Partnership and Community Safety Partnership; which both bring together local partners to deliver shared outcomes. These both met regularly during the year; and are attended by both senior officers and the relevant Cabinet portfolio holder. The Council is also an active participant in the Ashford and Canterbury Dementia Action Alliance which meets on a quarterly basis.

48. Ashford Borough Council has pledged to work with the Armed Forces to help and support regular and reservist servicemen and women, veterans and service families to ensure they do not face disadvantage compared to other citizens when accessing local services. Through the Covenant, the council works closely with partners including Kent County Council, the District Councils, the Ministry of Defence, the Armed Forces and Charity Sector.
49. The council is part of the Kent and Medway Information Sharing Partnership working with other public sector bodies to ensure data sharing arrangements work smoothly and in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018.

Engaging stakeholders effectively, including individual citizens and service users

50. The council produces a quarterly magazine to all residents in the borough, 'Ashford for You'. The magazine aims to keep residents up-to-date with the latest news about projects and services in an informal, user friendly format. Following an initial trial period, it was agreed to continue with the magazine on a permanent basis following positive feedback from residents of the borough.
51. The council's equalities objectives commit the organisation to working "with Ashford communities to tackle disadvantage and discrimination through consultation and involvement, whilst utilising Councillors' personal knowledge and understanding of their communities."
52. The Impact Assessment template used with all Cabinet reports enables report authors to highlight engagement and insight from services users when asking decision-makers to agree amended policies.
53. Consultation and engagement with residents and communities have taken place on specific issues and projects over the past year including:

Topic	Type of engagement
Vicarage Lane redevelopment	Informal engagement with stakeholders
Public Spaces Protection	Consultation
Council Tax Reduction Scheme	Consultation
Cycling and Walking Strategy	Consultation
Budget setting	Consultation
Conningbrook masterplanning	Consultation
Parish Council	Survey
Cultural Centre	Survey
Residents' Survey	Survey to 10,000 households
Draft Corporate Plan 2020-25	Workshop attended by circa 90

	stakeholders, focus group workshops with a full public consultation to follow in 2020/21.
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Principle C – Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

Sources of Assurance

Defining Outcomes	
	Five Year Corporate Plan
	Service Planning
	Risk Management Framework
Sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits	
	Medium term Financial Plan – Capital Programme and Investment Strategy
	Records of key Cabinet decisions and supporting materials
	Equality Objectives ensure fair access

Other Sources of Assurance

Defining outcomes

54. The strategic outcomes sought by the council are set out in the Corporate Plan 2015-2020. As previously mentioned, the next Corporate Plan 2020-2025 is under development and will set out the outcomes sought for the next 5 years together with a clear action plan for how they will be achieved.
55. The current performance framework was endorsed by Cabinet towards the end of 2017/18. Performance against a set of agreed indicators is reported on a quarterly basis to both the Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Whilst some of the council’s Key Performance Indicators (KPI’s) are aligned with the council’s national performance reporting duties for example, planning performance returns, other KPI’s are developed to assist with monitoring the delivery of the council’s Corporate Plan.
56. The council’s Directors meet to consider performance on a monthly basis for capacity issues to be identified and addressed at the earliest opportunity. These meetings will be developed over the course of the coming year to include other information including risks and service plan actions to provide a holistic view of service performance.

Key improvement area identified	The council's KPI's should be reviewed to ensure they reflect the ambitions of the new Corporate Plan, The review will also provide an opportunity to set meaningful targets for those KPIs where only baseline data is collected at present.
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57. The council adopted a risk management framework in 2018. The Corporate Risk Register is reported to both Management Team and the Audit Committee to ensure all risks are managed at the appropriate level whether they are strategic, delivery, financial or compliance risks. Services review their risks as part of the service planning process to ensure the Council's risk profile is appropriately reflected through the risks register.

58. The council sets out its equalities objectives in line with the Equalities Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty. How the council is delivering against its objectives is monitored on a six monthly basis by the council's Management Team. The objectives will be reviewed and submitted for adoption by the Cabinet together with the Corporate Plan in September of 2020.

59. Whilst the council does make available on its website a statement setting out its approach to equalities, articulation and delivery of its equality objectives could be strengthened through the development of a policy document which all staff are familiar with.

Key improvement area identified	Developing an equalities policy which sets out the council's objectives and how it intends to deliver them.
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Sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

60. The council combines programme management with service planning to balance demands and priorities with available resources. The potential benefits and outcome of any new project have to be tested against corporate objectives and the resources available to support the delivery of the project.

61. The council's approach to project management is designed to aid decision making about service provision. For example, a Project Initiation Document (PID) requires consideration to be given to the economic, social and environmental benefits of potential projects. The PID allows for different options to be considered so that those that deliver the most benefits can be pursued.

62. The council's aim to become financially self-sufficient by making commercial investments that deliver a return to underpin the council's medium term

financial plan demonstrates its ability to take a longer term view whilst managing risk.

Principle D – determining interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.

Sources of assurance

Determining interventions	
	Cabinet reports include options appraisals
	Medium-Term Financial Plan
Planning and programming Interventions	
	Five Year Corporate Plan
	Cabinet forward plan
	Risk management Framework
	Service planning aligns budgets, plans and objectives
	Communications Strategy
	Business Continuity Plans
	Emergency Plan
Optimising achievement of intended outcomes	
	Procurement Strategy includes Social Value

Other Sources of Assurance

Determining Interventions

63. Cabinet Members hold regular forward planning sessions to consider progress against the Corporate Plan and look ahead to determine the strategic issues facing the organisation to inform any interventions that may need to be made.
64. The Council's Directors meet on a fortnightly basis to consider strategic issues and respond to performance and risks and changing circumstances as they emerge in an agile way.
65. A Programme Management Group meets monthly to ensure the Council's projects are aligned to the strategic direction of the Council through rigorous analysis of potential project outcomes, risks and benefits compared to other projects so that people and financial resources can be appropriately allocated.

66. The council has clear governance arrangements in place for its strategic projects. For example, a framework has been created to oversee its large scale development, Chilmington. The framework called 'Chilmington Together' creates a structure whereby multiple groups, led by Members, officers and developers, enable and support the delivery of a high quality and sustainable development. Feedback from the various groups and boards is then provided to the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board, chaired by the Leader of the Council. This type of governance ensures that information is communicated to all relevant groups which is key to successfully completing the project. Furthermore, any challenges to delivery are identified through the various forums and steps to overcome these are also identified and assigned responsibility accordingly.
67. In response to the challenges faced by high streets nationally, the Cabinet adopted an Ashford Town Centre Framework in March 2018. During 2019/20, implementation of the Framework has been overseen by an officer group and the newly constituted Regeneration, Masterplanning and Project Co-ordination Board. These governance arrangements provide both a strategic and collaborative approach which has enabled the successful delivery of a series of projects and interventions in the town centre over the past year. The Board's role includes oversight of the Framework and

Planning for interventions

68. The remit of Management Team includes a focus on strategic issues and corporate governance matters. A detailed forward planning schedule ensures corporate governance issues are proactively monitored. Examples include regular performance on Freedom of Information, Data Protection and Corporate training.
69. Risks are monitored regularly at a service level, by Management Team on a quarterly basis and the Audit Committee on a six-monthly basis to determine any controls or actions that need to be put in place.
70. During the past year, the council worked closely with partners to ensure that changing circumstances arising from Brexit could be adapted to and mitigated against. For example, the council is part of the Kent Resilience Forum, Strategic and Tactical Command Groups who collaboratively developed various contingency plans to mitigate against Brexit related risks. In addition to Kent-wide contingency planning, the council identified key risks to the organisation and mitigation plans in the event of a 'no deal' scenario. These risks were regularly reviewed by the Council's Management Team Audit Committee.

Optimising achievement of intended outcomes

71. A public consultation on the draft budget is held each year.
72. The Budget Scrutiny Task Group scrutinises whether the draft budget is sound and achievable. In doing so, the Task Group assesses corporate and overarching risks against the draft budget proposals and capital plans of the council. The Task Group produces a report with recommendations to the Cabinet.
73. Human Resources oversee the council's approach towards workforce and capacity planning including regular appraisals and the provision of relevant training and development activity.
74. The council is committed to identifying and fulfilling the learning and development needs of members and officers. Officer training needs are identified through the annual appraisal process, six-monthly review and on an ongoing basis. A corporate training budget supports a training programme delivered throughout the year on topics relevant to the whole organisation.
75. An online training programme covers a wide range of topics which is supported by face-to-face training on specific topics which this year have included Diversity and Inclusion, Sustainability Friends, Emergency Planning and Website Accessibility training. Certain training is mandatory for all staff and any areas of non-compliance are closely monitored by the council's Management Team.
76. Personal development planning toolkits are available to all staff through the intranet and e-learning staff development portal (Ashford Achieve).

Developing the entity's capacity

77. The council continues to deliver its digital delivery programme which has the aims of both improving the customer experience and realising capacity to ensure a sustainable council for the future. The council is also focusing on developing its commercial strategy in order to further provide resilience to the council's financial strategy.
78. A significant element of the digital delivery programme in 2018/19 has been to prepare for the implementation of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines which came into force in September 2019. This work has involved training over 100 members of staff in writing web friendly content, formatting documents and awareness raising of the legislation.
79. The website has undergone a transformation to be accessible to all members of the public. Some work includes editing the wording of website content and converting documents to formats so that they can be accessed by all users. The council's accessibility score has increased from 60% to 98% as of February 2019, as a result of this work. Furthermore, the council's launch of a 'Your Ashford' app has enabled access to just under 80 different services.

80. Outstanding accessibility issues are described on the website's accessibility statement. To-date over 1000 pdfs have been converted to text or made accessible with approximately 700 remaining.

Key improvement area identified	To work towards compliance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines by September 2020.
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Developing the capability of the entity's leadership and other individuals

81. A Local Government Boundary Commission for England review was carried out in 2016 with the aims of ensuring the council was able to deliver electoral equality for voters in local elections; effective and convenient local government; and ensure that ward boundaries reflected the interest and identities of local communities. Following the review, an order was made to increase the number of councillors from 43 to 47 and this was implemented at the local elections in May 2019.

82. In order to support new and returning councillors, a comprehensive Member Induction Programme was developed and overseen by a Members' Training Panel during 2019/20. The Programme has included training courses, a revised suite of member guidance and information documents which included both information about local government and practical guidance for councillors. The training courses provided to Members during 2019/20 included:

- Code of Conduct
- Modern.Gov
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Planning Committee
- Licensing
- Audit
- Service Market Stalls Session
- Data Protection
- Equalities
- Charing skills

83. The council continues to embrace digital technology to provide more effective and efficient support to Members. The roll out of iPads to all 47 Members as of May 2019 enables them to access minutes and agendas in a paper-free way. This also contributes to the larger effort of becoming a 'paperless' organisation and reducing our carbon footprint where we can.

Principle F - Managing Risk and Performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

Sources of Assurance

Managing Risk	
	Risk management framework
	Risks regularly considered by Audit Committee and Management Team
Managing Performance	
	Quarterly performance reporting, including to Overview and Scrutiny
	Publication of all public committee minutes and agendas
	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Robust internal control	
	Internal and External Audit plans and reports
	Effective, resourced Internal Audit function
Managing data	
	Designated Data Protection Officer
	Data Protection Policy 2019
	GDPR Action Plan
	Data Protection Impact Assessment
	Remote working and portable devices guidance
	Quarterly budget monitoring reports to Cabinet

Other Sources of Assurance

Managing Risk

84. The council's Risk Management Framework is fully embedded with the council's corporate, service and project delivery risks registers, demonstrating a consistent corporate standard for risk identification, monitoring and mitigation.
85. As the framework articulates, risks and internal controls are identified each year as part of the service planning process to ensure that any potential risks to achieving outcomes sought are identified and mitigated against. Each risk has a 'risk owner' to ensure that responsibilities are clearly articulated.
86. The Council's risks are recorded on the council's performance management software, Pentana. Risk are reviewed monthly by risk owners which informs reporting to the council's Management Team and Audit Committee on the

council's corporate risk register. The risk register is dynamic with those risks outside of the council's risk appetite reported on. During the past year, the council received a 'Sound' audit for its risk management.

Managing Performance

87. As noted in principle C, the council has revised its performance management framework to provide a clearer picture of the interdependencies between programme and service actions, performance and risk.
88. The performance of individual projects is monitored on Pentana and reviewed at monthly meetings of the Programme Management Group. Any lessons learned during project delivery are captured through the use of the Project Evaluation Document and shared corporately through the Group.

Managing Data

89. The council's Corporate Information Governance Group (CIGG) meets regularly to consider data protection and cyber security issues. The Group brings together key officers involved in managing and protecting data. It receives regular reports on the council's performance on data protection and Freedom of Information functions and contributes towards the development of policy and communication of data protection and cyber security issues.
90. Over the past year, the Group has begun to work with individual services to review their Records of Processing Agreements (RoPAs). RoPAs are a recent requirement brought in by the General Data Protection Regulation. By having dedicated sessions with council services, the CIGG is working to ensure that proportionate solutions are recommended to ensure compliance with RoPAs and that the principle of accountability is high on the organisation's agenda.

Key improvement area identified	For the Corporate Information Governance Group to review service RoPAs and monitor compliance with them.
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91. The council's Data Protection Impact Assessment Template (DPIA) is embedded in the Project Management Toolkit to ensure that data protection is at the heart of any project involving significant data processing activity. DPIAs are reviewed by CIGG in order to ensure all risks are assessed.
92. Following mandatory data protection training in 2017/18, the importance of data protection continues to be communicated across the organisation with regular information provided through the council's Intranet and Smart Hub. Members were provided with data protection training as part of the induction programme.

Strong public financial management

93. The council is required to follow statutory guidance for the publication of its accounts. Each year, this guidance is reviewed and updated, and this is reported to the Audit Committee. This informs members of any updates on the council's accounts for 2019/20, and on the lessons learnt from the accounts process in 2018/19.

Principle G – Implementing good practice in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability

Sources of assurance

Implementing good practice in transparency	
	Annual Report
	Accessible website
	Transparency page
	Publications Scheme
Implementing good practice in reporting	
	Annual Report
	Annual financial statements
	Annual Governance Statement
Assurance and effective accountability	
	Head of Internal Audit
	Quarterly update on governance exemptions to Audit Committee

Other Sources of Assurance

Implementing good practice in transparency

94. The council has a continued commitment to transparency and meeting relevant legislative requirements. Data published under the Governments Transparency Code is available on the transparency pages of the website. These data sets include Council spending, salaries, fraud outcomes and more recently the gender pay gap.

95. The Transparency pages also explain the Publication Scheme which details the different classes of information that are routinely made available; Freedom of Information, Environmental Information and Subject Access Requests. Also available, is a comprehensive list of the council's policies and strategies which govern the way in which members and staff operate.

Implementing good practice in reporting

96. Reports to the council's committees are consistently presented through the use of a corporate committee template. The template ensures that due consideration has

been given to relevant factors to inform decision makers such as equalities impact, financial implications, risks and consultation.

97. However, a recent audit of the council's risk management arrangements highlighted that the report template could be strengthened as consideration of risk and in particular risk appetite was not always clearly articulated in reports to the council's Cabinet.

98. Having completed an initial review of the template in response to the audit recommendation, it was found that a more general review of the template and guidance would be beneficial to ensure that it reflects the most up-to-date legislative requirements and is useful to both report authors and decision makers.

Key improvement area identified	Review the committee report template and associated guidance to ensure legislative requirements are fully considered.
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How effective is our governance in meeting these principles?

99. The assurances noted above – both the component 'sources' and the other developments made within the year – provided a comprehensive overview of the council's governance framework. **Generally these arrangements work well for the Council and allow it to uphold good standards of accountability and effectiveness.**

Additional Governance Areas

- a. We do not consider that there have been any significant governance Issues arising in 2019/20. However the actions detailed below are in place to maintain good governance arrangements throughout 2020/21.
- b. These are in bold within the report, with a short action plan summarised below:

	Governance Area	Responsible	To be delivered by
1.	Review the Contract Standing Orders	Corporate Property and Projects	September 2020
2.	Review the Key Performance Indicator suite	Corporate Policy	September 2020
3.	Develop an equalities policy	Corporate Policy	December 2020
4.	Work towards compliance with website accessibility guidelines	Communications	September 2020
5.	Review of Records of Processing Agreements	Corporate Policy	March 2021
6.	Update Committee report template and associated guidance	Corporate Policy/Members Services	June 2020

- c. Through further action during 2020/21 in the areas noted above, the council's overall governance arrangements will remain strong – and indeed will strengthen further.
- d. These developments will be monitored regularly and reported on to the Audit Committee quarterly, and will be considered fully within the next Annual Governance Statement.

Cllr Gerry Clarkson, CBE, QFSM, BA (HONS)
Leader of the Council

Tracey Kerly
Chief Executive

On behalf of Ashford Borough Council

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