

Leader's 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

2018/19 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. Good governance is fundamental to meeting the Council's responsibilities and achieving high levels of service for residents. The Annual Governance Statement reports on the extent of the Council's compliance with its principles of good governance. The Statement explains the effectiveness of the governance arrangements for the year ending 31 March 2019 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.

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:

[Local Code of Corporate Governance](#)

4. The Local Code is underpinned by a framework of policies, procedures, behaviours and values by which the Council is governed. The documents that make up this framework provide members and officers with effective tools to ensure good governance across the organisation.
5. This statement sets out how the Council has demonstrated good governance that meets the core principles within the Local Code of Corporate Governance.

These core principles within the Local Code are:

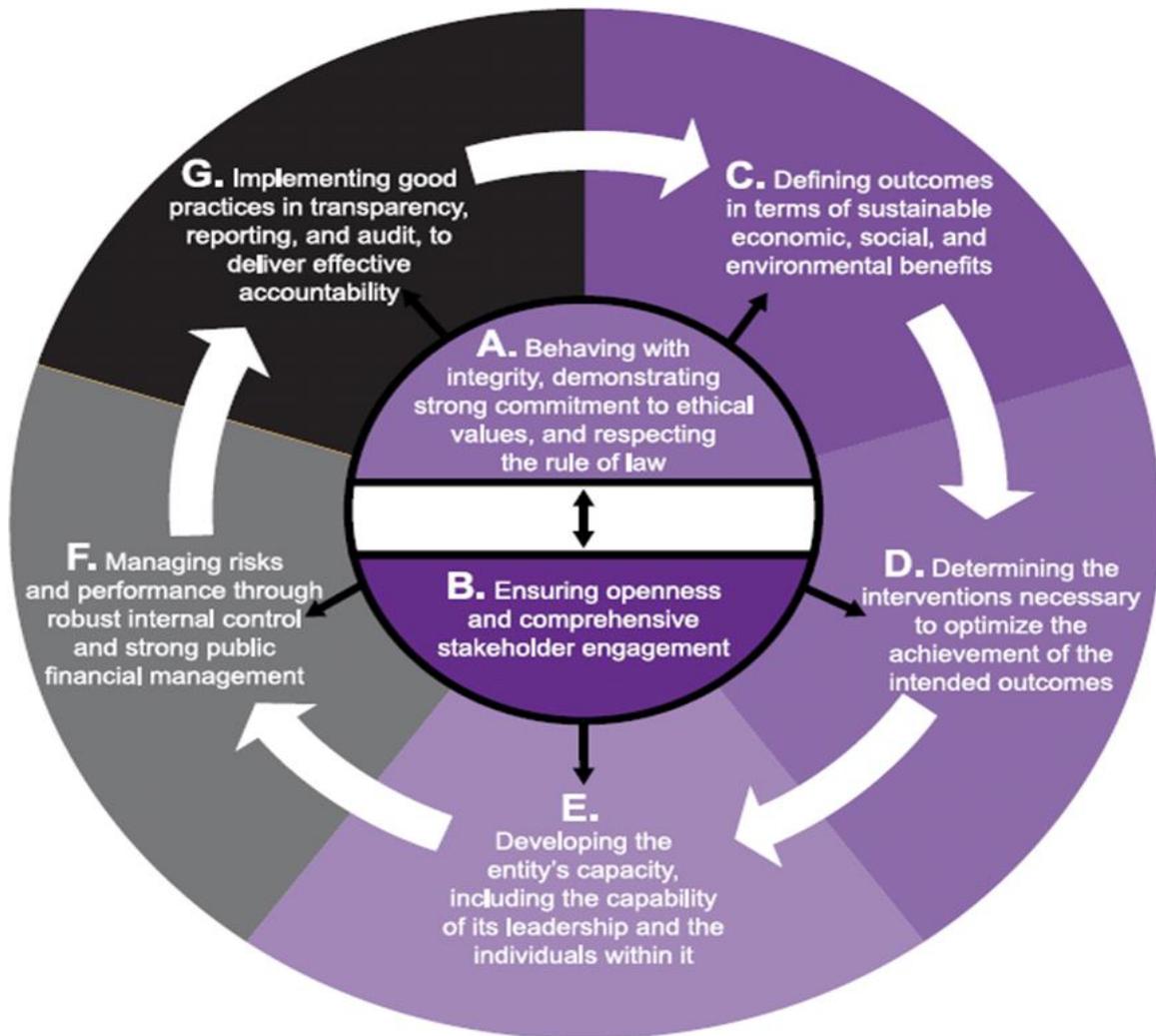
- A) Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law;
 - B) Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement;
 - C) Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits;
 - D) Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes;
 - E) Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.
 - F) Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
 - G) Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability
6. The Code encourages the Council to test its practice against these principles, and prepare an Annual Governance Statement in order to report publicly on the extent to which they comply within their own arrangements in the year, and on any planned changes for the coming year.
 7. The main principle underpinning this Local Code is that governance processes and structures focus on delivering sustainable economic, societal, and environmental outcomes.
 8. The Statement also explains how the Council is dealing with improvement areas identified in last year's Annual Governance Statement.

Purpose of the governance framework

9. The governance framework comprises the systems and process, and cultures and values by which the authority is directed and controlled and the activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community.
10. Good governance inspires public confidence. It provides the basis for public assurance that Council decisions are taken for the right reasons, that quality of service is protected as far as reasonably practicable, and that public money is wisely and effectively spent. In these times of tight resources and uncertain economic conditions, risks are more obvious. Our governance helps to focus on key controls and those risks are considered more critical to achieving the Council's strategic goals.
11. This Statement also allows the Council to meet the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2016, to prepare and publish an Annual Governance Statement to accompany the latest Annual Finance Report.

Our core principles for good corporate governance

12. The core principles which underpin our governance, and this Statement, were agreed in June 2016 as part of the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance, *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government 2016*.
13. As such, the Local Code sets out the component parts the Council seeks to demonstrate in order to show good governance. The AGS does not restate these principles in full, but the diagram below highlights the key components, and how they relate to each other –



14. The diagram makes it clear that good governance is dynamic, and that the Council should be committed to improving governance on a continuing basis through a process of evaluation and review.

15. The principles form the framework for this Statement's appraisal of the effectiveness of our governance arrangements over the last twelve months.

Dealing with last year's key improvements areas

16. The 2018/19 Annual Governance Statement identified three key improvement areas. Progress on remedying these governance exceptions has been reported to the Audit Committee on a quarterly basis throughout the year and is set out below:

Extending the use of Modern Gov

17. Much progress has been made with the Modern Gov project. The system is now used to publish agendas and minutes on both the Council website and Intranet. Management Team meetings are now hosted on the system and it is working well. The process for recording Officer delegated decisions is also now handled through Modern.Gov.

Local Government Association Peer Challenge Action Plan

18. In April 2018, the Council welcomed a team of Councillors and senior officers from Local Government Association (LGA) member authorities to complete a peer challenge of the Council's corporate governance. The peer challenge team made a report containing a number of recommendations. The report was considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 13 September 2018 together with an action plan to implement the recommendations.
19. The peer challenge process includes a light touch follow up visit expected to occur within two years of the original visit. In response to this, the majority of actions within the action plan are intended to be underway or complete within this timeframe.

Implementation of the Contract Management Project Plan

20. Following a comprehensive review of the Council's contract management arrangements earlier in 2018, a proposal was constructed to implement improvements in contract management.
21. The improvement plan continues to be implemented with good progress made to-date. A more proactive category-based procurement and contract management lifecycle approach has been developed to improve the structure, management and delivery of contracts. Progress includes a number of workshops that have been held across the organisation, the creation of a new Contract Officer post, the analysis of contract spend and the segmentation of contracts.
22. The next step will be to embed the use of the Contract Management Toolkit which has been developed following the review.

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

23. The Council's current code of conduct for Councillors was adopted on 20 July 2012 and has since been the subject of minor amendments. This code is based on Localism Act principles and was developed as a collaborative project by Kent Monitoring Officers in consultation with task groups of Councillors within individual Councils. The vast majority of district and parish Councils in Kent have adopted this "Kent Model Code of Conduct".
24. Complaints activity has been very low since adoption of the new Code of Conduct in 2012. Indeed up to the end of 2016, no complaints had been referred for formal investigation. The Monitoring Officer's Annual Report for 2017 referred to an increased level of code of conduct complaints arising during the year and involving

both borough and parish Councillors. The first formal complaint under the Council's adopted Good Practice Planning Protocol was also dealt with during the year. The report highlighted the fact that the increased use/misuse of social media by Councillors was a factor and had given rise to complaints about personal remarks and/or defamatory attacks. The Council's Standards Committee responded swiftly and has asked the Monitoring Officer to prepare a social media Guidance Note for Councillors to provide advice on risks, best practice etc. An amendment to the Code of Conduct has also now been agreed by the Council and these changes will now be taken forward and put in place in good time for the next Council.

25. During 2018, there has continued to be a rise in the number of formal and informal code of conduct complaints. The first investigation has now been completed and several informal complaints are still under consideration. The Monitoring Officer intends to review 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 very recently by the Committee on Standards in Public Life regarding Local Government Ethical Standards. The adoption of a social media guidance note and induction/training on this, following the elections, should assist.
26. All Council meetings and agendas include an early item seeking 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 process continues to demonstrate a culture of compliance with the code of conduct in relation to interests and a good general level of understanding by borough Councillors and desire to comply with the Code of Conduct and Planning Protocol.
27. 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.

A new Protocol for an Effective Councillor/Officer Relationship is being prepared in accordance with the recommendations of the Peer Review. It is anticipated that this will be approved and in place by the time of the local elections in May 2019.

Demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values

28. The Council's shared corporate values – Ambitious, Creative and Trustworthy – were adopted in August 2017. The values were informed by consultation with all staff and are now fully embedded within the organisation with briefings to managers and all staff and have been incorporated into the appraisals process. In addition, the Council's staff awards include categories that reflect these corporate values.
29. The annual appraisal process is also based on a 'Competency Framework' agreed in December 2014 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 including:

- 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.

30. The corporate training programme demonstrates the Council's strong commitment to ethical values with topics in the 2017/18 training programme including Dementia Friends workshops.

Respecting the rule of the law

31. As a statutory body the Council's structures for decision-making, its rules and its processes are influenced by legislation and associated regulatory needs. A fundamental part of our governance, therefore, is the Constitution. An important aim of the Constitution is to reinforce the principle of members and officers working together, and in partnership with others, to achieve common goals.

32. The Constitution is a legal requirement and sets out how the Council runs, how it should make decisions and the guidance it should follow to ensure these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. Some of these processes are needed by law, while others were chosen by the Council.

33. 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.

34. Parts of the Constitution are periodically reviewed to ensure the Council's arrangements remain relevant. Thus, changes are made as necessary to ensure our arrangements support effective performance of our responsibilities to residents and taxpayers, whilst fully supporting effective achievement of the Council's aims.

35. The Council has clear policies for dealing with breaches of legal and regulatory provisions effectively. For example, in anticipation to the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation in May 2018, the Council revised its Breach Management Policy and trained all staff on how to respond in the event of a breach to ensure compliance with the law.

The principal features of the Constitution



36. The most effective way to deliver cost effective services is for officers and members to work together with our partners to agree and achieve a common goal. A number of Boards, working groups or advisory committees comprising officers and members have met during the year to steer and monitor progress of high profile projects and services delivery.

37. All working groups have clear objectives which are set out in the terms of reference within the Constitution and reviewed annually. This year, new working groups relevant to achieving the Council's objectives have been instigated covering a range issues. For example, the Ashford Town Centre Place-Making Board has brought together a number of work streams from across the Council into a coordinated programme of projects relating to town centre activity. Another example, is Borough History, Heritage and Commemoration Task Group which oversaw a number of planned events and projects during 2018 aimed to increase

borough wide engagement in Ashford's History and Heritage, and in particular commemoration of the centenary of the end of the First World War.

Principle B – Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Sources of Assurance

Openness	
	Annual Report
	Council tax information available online
	Corporate Plan setting goals
	Residents' Survey (2018)
	Quarterly Resident's magazine
Engaging comprehensively with institutional stakeholders	
	Communications Strategy
Engaging stakeholder effectively, including individual citizens and service users	
	Communications Strategy

Other Sources of Assurance

Openness

38. In December 2015, the Council agreed a new Corporate Plan – “The Five Year Corporate Plan – for Aspiration, Action and Achievement”. This sets out what the Council aims to achieve in the following priority areas –
- Enterprising Ashford – economic growth and investment
 - Living Ashford – quality housing and homes for all
 - Active and Creative Ashford – healthy choices through physical, cultural and leisure engagement
 - Attractive Ashford – countryside and townscape, tourism and heritage.
39. The Council's Corporate Plan 2015-2020 sets out the priorities for the period it covers. The Corporate Plan period is publicly available on the Council's website and has been subject to regular scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – primarily through quarterly performance reports. A new Corporate Plan will be developed during 2019 to supersede the current Plan.
40. The Annual Report is a user friendly document which is aimed at keeping residents, partners and stakeholders informed of achievements made by the Council and its key partners during the year. The Report explains performance against the Council's key priorities.
41. 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.

42. 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.
43. Modern.Gov, is now full operational and its use has been extended further during the last year with officer decisions and Management Team minutes and agendas now managed effectively through the system.
44. For staff, various internal communications are used to promote awareness of the organisations overarching priorities, including the on-line monthly staff magazine, Root and Branch, and the Chief Executive's periodic 'walk about' briefings. The membership and format of CMT has been reviewed during 2018/19 to ensure it remains relevant and effective. The meetings now comprise briefings to raise awareness of key matters of interest to the Council's business operations and planning and workshop style sessions to achieve a more consultative approach to policy, strategy and procedures development.

Engaging comprehensively with institutional stakeholders

45. The Ashford Strategic Delivery Board ensures effective and timely delivery of key projects and includes local partners engaged in delivering agreed priorities. Quarterly updates report on progress towards key actions and the different stakeholders work together to address any barriers to progress when they emerge.
46. The Board is supported by a Strategic Co-ordination Team whose membership comprises high-level officers from the Council and stakeholder organisations. The Board reviewed in January 2019 the progress made in overseeing the delivery of the 'Big 8', its terms of reference and restated its commitment to driving projects in Ashford over the next few years to deliver the 'Next Big 8'.
47. Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council work in accordance with an agreed 'District Deal' which is unique within the county. This Deal, which is unique in Kent, is a statement of the two Council's shared commitment to work together to deliver the Council's priorities and better quality outcomes including the 'Big 8' projects and future service improvements. The two Councils refresh the District Deal at the start of each year to set the shared priorities for the year ahead.
48. The Council is also an active member of the Ashford Health and Wellbeing Board 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. Again to ensure that partnership arrangements remain effective they have been

reviewed during the course of the year. The result is that the Ashford Health and Wellbeing Board will be replaced by a Partnership during the 2018/19 year. This process included a full review of the Board's Terms of Reference and Membership as well as the development of action plans to drive the work of the new Partnership.

49. Representatives from the Council attended the Armed Forces Covenant Conference along with partners including the county and district Councils and the charity armed forces sector to share best practice. Following on from the conference, the Council has included the armed forces community as a protected characteristic group within its equalities impact assessment procedures; and continues to work closely with partners including Kent County Council, the District Councils, the Ministry of Defence, the Armed Forces and charity sector.
50. The Council is part of the Kent and Medway Information Sharing Partnership working with other public sector bodies to ensure data sharing arrangements in response to the General Data Protection Regulation.
51. The Council is an active participant in the Ashford and Canterbury Dementia Action Alliance which meets on a quarterly basis.

Engaging stakeholders effectively, including individual citizens and service users

52. During 2018 the Council strengthened its consultation process which was implemented more frequently than in previous years. Early in 2018, the Council began the process towards conducting a residents' survey which sought the opinions and priorities of residents on the Council and local area, the first residents' survey since 2014. The survey was issued to 10,000 households and had a positive response with over 20 per cent of surveys completed. The results were compiled into a report and shared with other services within the Council in order to formulate an action plan – which was submitted to the Cabinet in September 2018. The results of the survey have since been used to inform the development of service plans. Part of the action plan was to conduct further surveys in order to monitor improvements in opinion and the impact of Council activities; Cabinet agreed to conduct further surveys every 2 years. The next survey will take place in 2020.
53. Further, from July to October the Council ran a consultation regarding the regeneration of the town centre. Residents identified workstreams they'd like to see commence over the next few years, and identified barriers to progress. The results from this consultation and the action plan developed following analysis are to be reported to Cabinet in March 2019. During the 2018/19 year, the Council

has also employed an officer to assist with conducting and analysing surveys and consultations, as well as keeping track of consultations from central Government.

54. In order to further strengthen the Council's approach further, the development of a consultation toolkit is underway for use from May 2019. The toolkit will include a clear policy on the type of issues that the Council will meaningfully consult on to contribute towards the achievement of outcomes.
55. The Council continues to distribute a quarterly residents' magazine which is distributed to every household in the borough. The aim of the magazine is to improve communication and engagement with residents. As well as updates on developments, the magazine contains features and important information on Council services and activities as well as highlight upcoming events in the borough.
56. 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."
57. 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.
58. Consultation and engagement with residents and communities have also continued on specific issues and projects including:
 - Future improvements to Victoria Park
 - draft Masterplan to guide the future change of use and redevelopment at the Former Wye College (Wye 3)
 - Hackney carriage taxi fares
 - Local Plan to 2030 main modifications
 - Budget setting

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

59. The Council’s strategic outcomes are set out in the Corporate Plan 2015-2020. The Corporate Plan sets out the Council’s aims to become financially self-sufficient in order to achieve long term sustainability so the Council can continue to deliver benefits and outcomes to citizens, despite the loss of central government funding.
60. A review of the Council’s performance monitoring arrangements was undertaken during the latter half of the 2017/18 municipal year to reconcile key performance indicators, service level performance data and the Council’s existing programme management processes. A revised performance framework was endorsed by Cabinet towards the end of 2017/18, with monitoring of performance against the new key performance indicators beginning in April 2018.
61. Through migrating performance data and monitoring from the previous performance dashboard to the Council’s existing programme and risk management software, Directors, Heads of Service and Officers are afforded a more in-depth view of the Council’s operational performance on both a ‘project’ and ‘day job’ basis, with the revised suite of key performance indicators allowing for closer integration of performance data into programme management and the service planning process.

62. Quarterly performance reports have been considered through the municipal year by both the Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The performance framework will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, with the suite of performance indicators updated annually to ensure that all measures are relevant, meaningful and fit for purpose. Various contextual measures are compiled into a 'Borough Profile' reported on annually.
63. A new Performance Management Board has been introduced as part of the new performance framework which meets on a quarterly basis. The Performance Board meets to consider performance on a service-by-service basis so that any capacity issues can be identified and addressed at the earliest opportunity.
64. As 2018/19 was a baseline year for the new performance framework, the next step for 2019/20 will be to review the performance measures considered to date and determine where it is now appropriate to introduce targets against which performance can be assessed.
65. The Council's risk management framework which was reviewed during the course of 2017/18 was fully embedded during 2018/19. 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.

Sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

66. 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.
67. The Council received a Sound assurance rating following an audit of its Project Management processes in 2019/19. The Council's approach to project management is designed to aid decision making about service provision. For example, the Council's Project Initiation Document requires consideration to be given to the economic, social and environmental benefits of potential projects. Following the audit, further work has been carried out during 2018/19 to strengthen the Council's project management. A skills audit to identify project management skills across the organisation has taken place and a revised Project Management Toolkit produced in order to support Project Managers across the organisation.
68. 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

- 69. 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.
- 70. The Council's Directors meet on a fortnightly basis to consider strategic issues and respond to risks and changing circumstances as they emerge in an agile way.
- 71. A Programme Management Group was introduced in August 2018. Part of the Terms of Reference of the Group is 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.

Planning for interventions

- 72. The remit of Management Team includes a focus on strategic issues and corporate governance matters. A detailed forward planning schedule has been

developed which has provided an enhanced focus on proactively monitoring corporate governance issues.

73. Risks are monitored regularly at a service level and Management Team consider service risks on a quarterly basis to determine any controls or actions that need to be put in place to mitigate risk. The Council's risks are now monitored using risk management software which provides a clear audit of risk profile over time so that trends can be analysed. The Council's Audit Committee also keep an overview of the Council's risk profile by considering the controls in place for risks that feature on the Corporate Risk Register.
74. During the past year, the Council has worked closely with partners to ensure that changing circumstances arising from Brexit can be adapted to and mitigated against. For example, the Council is part of the Kent Resilience Forum, Strategic and Tactical Command Groups who have been collaboratively developing various contingency plans to mitigate against Brexit related risks. Additional MAGIC training has been attended by staff within the Council's Emergency Plan. In addition to Kent-wide contingency planning, the Council has identified key risks to the organisation and mitigation plans in the event of a 'no deal' scenario. These risks have been regularly reviewed by the Council's Management Team and also considered by the Council's Audit Committee. Locally, the Council's Management Team have been meeting regularly to monitor risks and respond with mitigation strategies.

Optimising achievement of intended outcomes

75. A public consultation on the draft budget is held each year.
76. 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.
77. Human Resources oversee the Council's approach towards workforce and capacity planning including regular appraisals and the provision of relevant training and development activity.
78. 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. 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 safeguarding and Strength Deployment Inventory. Certain training is mandatory

for all staff and any areas of non-compliance are closely monitored by the Council's Management Team.

79. Personal development planning toolkits are available to all staff through the intranet and e-learning staff development portal (Ashford Achieve).

Principle E – Developing the entity’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

Developing the entity’s capacity

80. The Council has embarked on a digital delivery project which this year has seen the launch of a new corporate website making it easier for customers to find information and transact with the Council online. The digital project has already released capacity in certain services which has been redeployed to strengthen other areas of the business. A programme has been developed to extend this work across the Council with a focus on addressing high volume transactions in the first instance.

Developing the capability of the entity’s leadership and other individuals

81. As community leaders, it is vital that our Councillors are supported to be as effective as possible. Members’ training needs are considered through a Member Training Panel and the following training sessions have been delivered for Members during 2018/19:

- Data Protection
- Chairmanship Skills
- Planning – Tour of Completed Development
- Licensing Committee Training
- Emergency Planning/Resilience/Business Continuity
- Safeguarding Training (including complementary e-learning)
- Future of NHS Locally
- Taxi Licensing
- GDPR (including complementary e-learning)
- Licensing Act
- Dementia Friends

82. This year, the Member Training Panel has had a particular focus on developing a Member Induction Programme for the new Council from May 2019. As well as a comprehensive training programme, a revised suite of member guidance and information documents is being developed which will include both information about local government and practical guidance for Councillors.

83. The Council continues to embrace digital technology to provide more effective and efficient support to Members. 23 Members have been using iPads during 2017/18 enabling them to access minutes and agenda in a paper-free way. The roll out of iPads will be extended to all Members at the start of the new Council Year in May 2019.

84. 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. In 2018/19, the Council has developed the staff engagement and welfare programme through the introduction of the 'Onion Club'. The Onion Club is a staff-led programme of social and fitness clubs aimed at providing something for everyone. The initial focus of the Club was on a weight loss programme but the club has now extended to cover a range of activities such as book, film, knitting, running and walking clubs.

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

85. The Council revised its Risk Management Framework during 2017/18. The new framework is now fully embedded with the Council's corporate, service and project delivery risks registers, demonstrating a consistent corporate standard for risk identification, monitoring and mitigation.
86. 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. These risks are regularly monitored and any new risks that emerge are included on the corporate risk register together with those identified at the outset. Each risk has a 'risk owner' to ensure that responsibilities are clearly articulated.

87. 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.

Managing Performance

88. 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.

89. The performance of individual projects is monitored on Pentana and reviewed by 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 Programme Management Group.

Managing Data

90. Following on from extensive work in 2017/18 to get the Council ready for the implementation of the General Data Protection Act 2018, the Council's Corporate Information Governance Group (CIGG) continues to meet 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.

91. Over the past year, the Group has overseen the implementation of GDPR, the development of the revised Data Protection Policy which has been updated to reflect GDPR requirements and a Remote Working and Portable Devices guide. In addition the group has reviewed organisational and technological measures in place to safeguard data including the Council's password policy.

92. A particular focus for the Group in 2019/20 will be to oversee a programme of training and communication on the subject of cyber security.

93. The Data Protection Impact Assessment Template (DPIA) which was developed during 2017/18 has been used to assess privacy risks on projects during 2018/19 including the roll out of laptops to all staff across the organisation and the introduction of the new Customer Relationship Management software. The DPIA form 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.

94. 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.

95. A corporate retention schedule sets out the time periods for retaining all data

assets. This is a live document and will need to be reviewed by services over the course of the next year.

Strong public financial management

96. 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 2018/19, and on the lessons learnt from the accounts process in 2017/18.

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
	Sustainable Community Strategy

Other Sources of Assurance

Implementing good practice in transparency

97. 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.

98. 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

99. Staff use report templates to ensure consistency of reporting across the organisation and that the implications of any matter are fully considered.

How effective is our governance in meeting these principles?

100. 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.

101. 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 2018/19. However the actions detailed below are in place to maintain good governance arrangements throughout 2019/20.
- b. These are in bold within the report, with a short action plan summarised below –

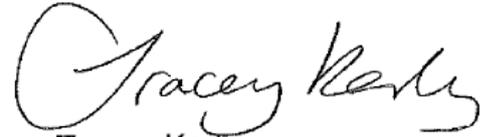
	Governance Area	Responsible	To be delivered by
1.	Development and adoption of Social Media Guidance for Members.	Director of Law and Governance	June 2019
2.	Introduce Member/Officer Protocol at Member Induction in May 2019 and as part of the officer induction programme	Director of Law and Governance	June 2019
3.	Development a Consultation Toolkit for use across the organisation.	Corporate Policy	September 2019
4.	Development of a programme of cyber security awareness including improved password policy roll out, training, phishing exercises and internal communications campaigns	IT Manager and Head of HR	March 2020

- c. Through further action during 2018/19 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