

AUDIT AND ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE
3 FEBRUARY 2021

REVIEW OF SIGNIFICANT GOVERNANCE ISSUES IN THE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update members of the Audit & Accounts Committee on the significant governance issues identified in the Annual Governance Statement.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 At the meeting of the Audit & Accounts Committee on 25 November 2020, Members approved the Annual Governance Statement for the Council, with forms part of the Council's Statement of Accounts. To ensure that Members are able to undertake their assurance role, this report updates the Committee on the status of the significant governance issues identified within it.
- 2.2 An extract from the Annual Governance Statement showing the issues identified is attached at Appendix A.

3.0 Results of the Review

- 3.1 The issues identified are considered separately below with details of any further work undertaken.
- 3.2 Re-Integration of the Housing Management Function – The HAG continues to meet ahead of HCC pre agenda to provide feedback and scrutiny to papers for the Homes and Community Committee and comments are included under "Comments from Director" section of the report.

The Tenant Forum has also restarted virtually and is pulling together a programme of scrutiny and performance monitoring which will be brought to a future HCC.

The first phase of the Tenant Engagement and Participation Review is coming to a close – various questions asked through our Viewpoint survey to understand how tenants find our services and how they want to engage.

A self-assessment has been completed against the White Paper and Consumer Standards to identify areas of further work and a tenant will be appointed sponsor for each theme.

The Annual Tenant Report is being finalised (A requirement under Consumer Standards to share details of performance with all tenants annually).

Progress has been made with the integration of the housing function in the Council through the restructure that is currently being worked through (at a manager level initially), that brings together services within the council based on function and synergies. We anticipate this restructure to be completed by end of March 2021.

- 3.3 Development Company – The Company has now started its first development at Bowbridge Road with work progressing well.

Policy and Finance Committee approved the equity finance and loan funding to the Company at its meeting on 23rd June 2019. The Heads of Terms for the loan agreement was approved at Policy and Finance Committee on 21st January 2021.

An audit was completed by the Council's internal auditors during July 2019. The audit focused on a number of areas relating to Arkwood Developments Ltd including the governance mechanisms that the Council had in place to ensure that it had good oversight and structures to ensure that compliance with good practice concerning councils and their wholly owned companies. The report gained substantial assurance, and the four recommendations that were set out in the report have since been completed.

It is therefore proposed that once the loan agreement has been signed, that this issue is fully mitigated and the on-going monitoring of the company will be discharged through the Council's Shareholder Committee.

4.0 COVID-19

- 4.1 Additionally to the items at section 3 above, the AGS declared that the key issue at that time was COVID-19.

- 4.2 Newark and Sherwood District Council stood up their Covid-19 emergency planning teams in early March and this marked the beginning of a challenging year with Newark and Sherwood's staff continuing to deliver for the community through adversity. There are four main Covid-19 response areas for noting;

- 4.3 Firstly, **supporting residents through the HART team (Humanitarian Assistance Response Team)**, a team set-up on the 16 March 2020 to support local residents in the following areas;

- Delivering essential food, supplies and medical items to support those who are isolated, vulnerable or shielding within the district,
- Linking support to test and trace to ensure isolating individuals can access support and aid,
- Proactively supporting community and voluntary sector groups, such as village halls and community and voluntary sports clubs, to access support and grants,
- Undertaking targeted community action for example creating a communal shower area for family clusters on Park View, a local gypsy and traveller caravan,
- Assisting with exemption badges for vulnerable residents who cannot wear facemasks due to health conditions, and
- Distributing food packages (this was coordinated from the Palace Theatre during the first lockdown when the stage was converted in a food distribution hub).

As of 13 January 2021 HART have undertaken **1,207 actions**;

- 353 Telephone advice/referral to another service
- 312 Medication deliveries
- 180 Food parcel deliveries
- 288 Welfare Checks
- 74 other activities such as delivery of food supply to support community groups

- 4.4 Secondly, **supporting business with a range of advice and grants**. Thousands of businesses have been awarded grant support through the national schemes and this has been complimented by the Local Authority Discretionary Grant scheme. This grant scheme, run by the Council, was aimed at small and micro businesses who were not eligible for the Small Business Grant or the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Grant. This fund was awarded to 127 businesses and £1,239,105.67 was paid out. Currently businesses are able to apply for the High Street Diversification Fund Grant. This is the third round of the grant run by Newark and Sherwood District Council and provides funding for local, independent high-street based retail/hospitality businesses to invest in sponsored social media advertising. The first two rounds of the High Street Diversification Fund saw nearly 120 local businesses receive a grant.
- 4.5 Thirdly, **keeping residents safe through a programme of advice, support and enforcement**. Public Protection have been dealing with higher quantities of noise complaints (as more people have been at home) and Anti-social Behaviour reports as well as taking on the enforcement of Covid-19 guidance. They have been working throughout the pandemic to support and enforce Covid-19 guidance and legislation including supporting businesses to transition to take-away services, providing advice on social distancing and undertaking difficult enforcement actions. The public protection team also led the 'Community Engagement Ambassador' scheme where staff from across the Council volunteered their time to support retail and hospitality reopening to ensure the safety of residents. On the 25 June 2020 Community Ambassadors were deployed over 5 days in the main commercial areas of the district to advise businesses and the public, and refer issues for advice and, if required, enforcement.
- 4.6 Finally, and perhaps the most impressively, **alongside all the new activities and pressures staff have continued to deliver excellent services to residents**. The responsive repairs team are delivering emergency repairs within their 24-hour target, waste collections have continued throughout the pandemic and the homelessness team have continued to support people into accommodation.

5.0 Financial Implications FIN(20-21/6029)

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

6.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 That the Committee notes the results of the review of significant governance issues as identified in the Annual Governance Statement.

Background Papers

Annual Governance Statement for 2019/20

For further information please contact Nick Wilson, Business Manager– Financial Services on Ext: 5317

Nick Wilson
Business Manager – Financial Services