

Statement of the Council's and Chief Financial Officer's Responsibilities for the Statement of Accounts**The Council's Responsibilities**

Under Section 1 of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 a council shall make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs. A council shall designate an officer of the council as its chief financial officer and these arrangements shall be carried out under the supervision of its chief financial officer.

Under Regulation 7 of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 the Council, or a Committee, is required by resolution, to approve the accounts.

These accounts were approved by the Chief Executive on the.

The Chief Financial Officer's Responsibilities

Under Regulation 8 of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015, the Chief Financial Officer is responsible for the preparation of the Council's Statement of Accounts in the form directed by the Department for Communities.

The accounts must give a true and fair view of the income and expenditure and cash flows for the financial year and the financial position as at the end of the financial year.

In preparing this Statement of Accounts, the Chief Financial officer is required to:

- observe the Accounts Direction issued by the Department for Communities including compliance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom
- follow relevant accounting and disclosure requirements and apply suitable accounting policies on a consistent basis, and
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent.

The Chief Financial Officer is also required to:

- keep proper accounting records that are up-to-date, and
- take reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Annual Governance Statement

Scope of Responsibility

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiency and effectively.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council also has a duty under Local Government (Best Value) Act (Northern Ireland) 2002 to make arrangements for continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council has prepared an Annual Governance Statement which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government. This statement explains how Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council meets the requirements of Regulation 4 of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland 2015) in relation to the publication of a statement on internal control.

The Purpose of the Governance Framework

Council's governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The governance framework has been in place for the year ended 31 March 2020 and up to the date of approval of the financial statements.

The governance framework

The key elements of the systems and processes that comprise the Council's governance arrangements include the following:

1. Identifying and communicating the Council's vision of its purpose and intended outcomes for citizens and service users.

Council has produced the Corporate Strategy for 2015-2019, which was agreed by Council on 30th June 2015.

The Corporate Strategy was developed following an extensive consultation process which involved Councillors, senior managers within Council, and our local community including local businesses and the community/voluntary sector. An advertisement was also placed seeking comments from the public on our draft Corporate Strategy before it was finalised and adopted by Council.

A copy of the Corporate Strategy has been made available to staff on the intranet and the public via the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council website. Hard copies have also been made available in the reception areas of Council facilities.

This Strategy sets out Council's Vision, Mission, Values and Strategic themes. The Plan identifies five strategic themes with associated outcomes.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council has worked with its Strategic Partners to develop the Causeway Coast and Glens Community Plan. The Community Plan was formally signed off by the Community Planning Strategic Partnership in April 2017 and was formally launched in June 2017.

Ten Councillors were nominated to participate on behalf of Council on the Strategic Partnership and they have been closely involved in developing the Community Plan.

The development of the Community Plan involved; a detailed statistical analysis of the Causeway Coast and Glens area; an extensive community engagement/consultation exercise; the establishment of thematic working groups to develop population outcomes and indicators; mutual agreement by the members of the Community Planning Strategic Partnership of the final version of the Plan.

The next stage in the process of community planning involved taking the outcomes identified within the Plan and developing a Delivery Plan, which identified actions necessary to achieve the Population Outcomes in the Plan. This work commenced in June 2017, and finalized in June 2018 with the launch of the Delivery Plan for the Community Plan.

This Delivery Plan identified 44 practical collaborative actions which will take forward the high level outcomes identified in the Community Plan itself. The Delivery Plan was based on the work of a number of Delivery Design Groups which included representatives from the statutory partners along with a range of support partners from other appropriate organisations.

The next phase of the process was the implementation of a monitoring and reporting process overseen by the Strategic Partnership and this commenced in June 2018. Each Action Lead was required to complete a report card outlining progress on their action. This reporting process was undertaken on a quarterly basis. Summarised reports of progress were then submitted and considered by the Strategic Community Planning Partnership at their quarterly meetings.

In November 2019 the Department for Communities published guidance on Monitoring and Reporting in relation to Community Planning. As a result of this the Statutory Partnership agreed to form a Monitoring and Report Sub Group which would specifically look at developing the monitoring and reporting process for the Causeway Coast and Glens Community Plan. This is being taken forward through the development of new report cards which have been enhanced to include more outcome based performance measures. This will be followed up by further training for Action Leads and Strategic Partners on outcomes based monitoring and reporting. This training has been arranged in conjunction with our neighbouring Council areas (Mid and East Antrim and Antrim Newtownabbey) and took place in June 2019, facilitated by David Burnby.

The Department's Guidance on Monitoring and Reporting also includes guidance on the production of a statutory public Statement of Progress in relation to the Community Plan which will be published in November 2019. Development of the Statement of Progress is also being taken forward by the Monitoring and Report Sub Group.

Council have agreed a development plan for the Council Strategy/Corporate Plan 2019-2024.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council has commenced work on a new Local Development Plan (LDP) for the Borough. The LDP is the spatial reflection of the Community Plan and provides an opportunity to develop a new planning framework specific to Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area, balancing the development needs of the Borough with the protection of our built and natural assets.

Following publication of the LDP: Preferred Options Paper (POP) in June 2018 for comment, for comment during 2019/20 the Planning Department analysed the representations received and commenced the drafting of strategic planning policies to be published in the LDP: Draft Plan Strategy. To date this stage of LDP preparation has included Consultee and Stakeholder Engagement and Member workshops.

Towards the end of the 2019/20 reporting period Government/Public Health Agency (PHA) advice in relation to the Covid-19 outbreak resulted in the postponement of planned LDP Consultee and Stakeholder Meetings and Member Workshops. However, this work has resumed during the 2020/21 reporting period and Public Consultation on the Draft Plan Strategy will be undertaken upon publication of the consultation document, in line with the Council's published LDP Timetable and any future Government/PHA advice.

The impact of the pandemic has required the development of the new Council Strategy to be reshaped with an updated draft of the new Corporate Strategy being presented to Committee in August 2020.

2. Reviewing the Council's vision and its implications for the Council's governance arrangements.

The vision of the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council over the 2015-2019 timeframe is to

“Maximise the benefits of our unique location and landscape by providing ambitious, accessible, innovative and efficient services which fulfil customer expectations”

The mission of the Council for 2015-2019 is to

“Improve the quality of life and well-being for all of our citizens and visitors by:

- Providing effective and sustainable local public services.
- Accelerating our economy and improving economic prosperity.
- Placing local communities at the heart of decision making.
- Protecting and enhancing our unique natural environment and assets.
- Advocating for the area and our citizens in both local and international arenas.

The Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council will deliver its services and meet its responsibilities to ratepayers and communities across the Council area by adhering to the following values : Fairness, Excellence, Sustainability and Efficiency, Empowerment and Innovation.

The strategic themes identified in the Council's Corporate Strategy for 2015-19 were designed to ensure the vision is realised, with each objective having a series of sub-objectives.

The strategic themes are as follows:-

- Leader and Champion
- Accelerating Our Economy and Contributing to Prosperity
- Innovation and Transformation
- Resilient, Healthy and Engaged Communities
- Protecting and Enhancing Our Environments and Assets

All reports presented to Council identify the Strategic Theme, ensuring alignment with Council objectives. A template has been developed for Committee and Council reports which clearly identifies the linkage to the Council Strategy with officers required to identify the Strategic Theme and Outcome the subject of the report will contribute to.

The corporate risk register identifies the factors which could prevent achievement of these objectives and each risk is assigned to a member of the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT). The Corporate Risk Register is updated by SLT and presented to Audit Committee on a quarterly basis.

During the year the process of developing a new Council Corporate Strategy for the Council for 2020 to 2024 continued. This development process was established and agreed by the Senior Leadership Team and the first stage in the process saw initial research work undertaken to gather qualitative and quantitative evidence in relation to the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area.

The second stage was designed to initiate an internal consultation process to gather views and comments from Councillors and staff. This process was to start with a workshop for Councillors. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, this workshop did not take place until Saturday 29th February 2020. The Councillors who attended this workshop explored and generated ideas for a new Vision for the area, considered the Council's Mission Statement, identified values underpinning the work of the Council and suggested high level strategic themes for the new Corporate Strategy. From this workshop a first draft of the new Corporate Strategy was developed.

The impact of the pandemic has again affected the proposed timetable for development of the new Council Strategy with the Senior Leadership Team currently in the process of considering the first draft of the new Corporate Strategy.”

3. Measuring the quality of services for users through the Citizen Satisfaction Survey, for ensuring they are delivered in accordance with the Council's objectives and for ensuring that they represent the best use of resources.

Council is committed to providing quality services aligned to its strategic objectives and has commenced developing business plans for all key services.

The business plan template requires officers to identify relevant actions under each Strategic Theme and related Outcome. These actions are supported by key performance indicators, timescales, lead officers, identification of internal and external partners and how the action links to the Council's Performance Plan.

Council continue to monitor, review and take corrective action as necessary in striving to achieve maximum satisfaction with council services, within the allocated resources.

During the year Council considered all available information in deciding how best to deliver the services within the area.

Council revised its Comments, Complaints and Compliments Policy in 2018 to include a process to deal with complaints made against the Chief Executive. A copy of the revised policy is available on Council's website.

As part of the Corporate Performance Improvement Plan for 2019/20 Council committed to the following Improvement Objective:

"We will introduce a robust arrangement for engaging with our citizens."

Through this Improvement Objective we have agreed to deliver the following during 2019/20:

- We will conduct a public procurement exercise to commission a Citizen's Survey for Causeway Coast and Glens
- We will create an all Council survey for Causeway Coast and Glens that will include key questions and measures on the services we provide, the perceptions of our citizens and indicators that are demonstrative of how we are delivering for our citizens.
- We will hold public meetings and conduct face to face conversations with citizens in order to understand better how we are performing

The 2019/20 financial year was subject to budgetary constraints and as a result the programme of citizen engagement actions did not happen. It is the intention to undertake this work once Council facilities and services are fully operational given there may be changes to the way in which Council services operate in the Covid-19 environment in the future.

4. Defining and documenting the roles and responsibilities of the executive, non-executive, scrutiny and officer functions, with clear delegation arrangements and protocols for effective communication.

The roles and responsibilities of the Members of Council are defined by the Northern Ireland Code of Local Government Conduct, which is now mandatory, effective from 28th May 2014.

Training continues to be delivered to all members, as soon as they come into office.

Roles and responsibilities of Senior Officers are defined by job description, job specification, and terms and conditions of employment. Formal staff appraisals are currently in place for Senior Leadership Team (SLT), and this process is currently being developed in line with Leadership and Development Management Programme.

All internal policies and procedures are available on Council's staff net for information, and are also included as part of the induction process for all new employees.

During the 2017/18 year, guidelines and a flowchart was developed and agreed to assist with effective Policy Development. This flowchart was revised in October 2018 in an effort to simplify the process.

All Directors report to Council on a monthly basis, on areas of responsibility, and ensure Council are kept informed of progress within each service area.

In terms of decision making, all decisions taken by Committee are ratified by full council, with the exception of Planning Committee which has full council powers. There are 6 committees of Council and the meeting schedule is as follows:

- Tuesday Week 1 – Council Meeting
- Tuesday Week 2 – Environmental Services Committee
- Tuesday Week 3 – Leisure and Development Committee
- Tuesday Week 4 – Corporate Policy and Resources Committee
- Thursday Week 2 – Finance Committee
- Wednesday Week 4 – Planning Meeting
- Quarterly – Audit Committee

Scrutiny is provided by the Audit Committee, Internal Audit (co-sourcing arrangement) and the Local Government Auditor. PWC provide interim support to the Finance Committee.

There are also a number of Sub-Committees and working groups which have either Terms of Reference agreed by Council, or are tasked with a particular project.

Council currently communicates with wider stakeholders through various engagement processes, meetings, Council Website, Social Media and through press and media releases. Internal communication systems include Councils intranet, Staff newsletter, email, written correspondence, working group minutes and a mixture of formal and informal team meetings.

Council developed a Citizens Newsletter in 2017/18 and this continued to be produced and circulated to all households in the Borough during 2019/20.

5. Developing, communicating and embedding codes of conduct, defining the standards of behaviour for members and staff.

Codes of Conduct of Members

The Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors came into force on 28th May 2014. All members have been trained on the code, with training provided to new and co-opted members as soon as possible.

A Register of Interests is maintained and updated on an annual basis, or as and when required. In terms of travel and subsistence claims, Councillors are required to complete a claim form (submitted with receipts as appropriate) and sign a declaration regarding their claim.

Codes of Conduct for Officers

Council has adopted the "Code of Conduct for Local Government Officers", agreed by the Local Government Reform Joint Forum Circular LGRFJ/09 – November 2014 and promulgated under the authority of the Local Government Staff Commission. Mandatory training was provided to all staff in relation to the Code of Conduct during the 2015/16 year. It is also covered as part of the Induction process for new employees.

During the 2019/20 year a further 85 employees received training. Going forward, in 2020/2021 mandatory training for all staff will be delivered via the Elearning pilot module and face-to-face training for operational staff.

When new employees commence employment with the Council the Code of Conduct is sent out with their Main Statement of Terms and Conditions. Employees are asked to confirm, in writing, that they have received and read a copy of the Code. Job Descriptions within Council also require employees as part of their duties and responsibilities to adhere to the Code of Conduct for Local Government Officers.

Officers are given a copy of their code on taking up appointment and failure to adhere to it is a disciplinary offence. Officers are also issued with terms and conditions of employment on commencing employment with the Council, and would be advised of various policies and procedures on induction. Existing members of staff have access to these documents on the intranet. New policies and procedures are brought to the attention of staff and are also available via the Council's intranet system.

The induction process for all new staff includes a detailed explanation of specific policies on staff conduct, including travelling and subsistence expenses, disciplinary and grievance policies and procedures, absence and sickness reporting, Data Protection, Freedom of Information, Equality and Good Relations and Health and Safety at Work.

Other supplementary codes of practice relating to the conduct expected of employees are available to staff via the Council's intranet system.

A register of gifts and hospitality is maintained by the Democratic Services Department and this is updated when relevant information is provided by a member of staff and elected members.

6. Reviewing and updating standing orders, standing financial instructions, a scheme of delegation and supporting procedure notes/manuals, which clearly define how decisions are taken and the processes and controls required managing risks.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council operates a system of standing orders for the regulation of the proceedings of the Council and Council business. There was one revision to the Standing Orders during 2019/20. Council also adopted the revised scheme of allowances for members during the year.

The Standing Orders are included within the Council's Constitution. A Council is required, under section 2 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, to prepare and keep up to date a Constitution. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council adopted a new Constitution on 22nd September 2015. This Constitution governs how the Council operates, how decisions are made, and the procedures which are to be followed to ensure efficiency, transparency and accountability to local people. Some of these processes are required by the law, while others are a matter for the Council to choose. This is updated as and when required, following the revision of Standing Orders and the Scheme of Allowances. The Council Constitution and Standing Orders were updated in November 2019.

The Constitution is divided into sixteen Articles which set out the basic rules governing the Council's business. More detailed procedures and codes of practice are provided in separate Rules and Protocols within the document.

The Scheme of Delegation for Development Management, Development Plan, Enforcement and Other Planning Functions and the Protocol for the Operation of the Planning Committee took effect from 1st April 2015 on the transfer of Planning functions to local government.

During the 2015/16 business year the Scheme of Delegation was revised and took effect on 5th November 2015 having been approved by the Department for Infrastructure on same date. The Protocol was also reviewed and implemented on 25 November 2015.

In 2016/17 the Scheme of Delegation and Protocol were further reviewed and further to approval from DfI on 28 October 2016 were implemented on 07 November 2016

The Protocol was again reviewed in 2017/18 and changes implemented on 8th November 2017 but the Scheme of Delegation was unchanged at that time.

These were reviewed again over the 2018/19 business year and a revised Scheme of Delegation and Protocol for the Operation of the Planning Department was implemented on 28 January 2019 following DfI approval on 17 January 2019.

In the 2019/20 business year, both the Scheme of Delegation and the Protocol have been reviewed and further to approval from DfI on 30 March 2020 were implemented on 01 May 2020.

A financial policy manual was approved by Council in June 2020. Detailed policies and procedures in relation to Purchasing and Procurement including expenditure limits and authorisation signatures are in place, reviewed periodically and updated as required. The current version of the procurement policy was approved by Council in March 2019.

Council has a Risk Management Strategy, which requires the identification of Corporate and Departmental Risks, the assessment of impact and likelihood of those risks and the mitigating controls in place. Council has Corporate and Departmental risk registers in place, and these are reviewed regularly. The Corporate Risk Register is reviewed by SLT and presented to the Audit Committee Quarterly. The current Information Risk Management Policy was agreed by Audit Committee in September 2018.

A Treasury Management Policy was approved by Council in December 2014. The policy was developed in the context of the Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 and the local Government (Capital Finance and Accounting) Regulations (NI) 2011 and includes the key principles of CIPFA's Treasury Management in the Public Sector Code of Practice. A revised Treasury Management Policy was approved by Council in August 2018. Annual Treasury Management Strategy statements setting out the expected treasury management operations for the year were also approved by Council.

7. Undertaking the core functions of an Audit Committee, as identified in CIPFA's Audit Committees - Practical Guidance for Local Authorities.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council operate a committee system, with the Audit Committee meeting once per quarter.

Representation on the Audit Committee is based on the d'hondt system, with 16 elected members, representative of each political party grouping in Council, and 1 Independent Advisor. All meetings are attended by the Director of Performance, relevant Council officers, along with Local Government Auditor and Internal Auditor (co-sourcing partner). The Audit Committee Terms of Reference have been documented and approved by Council. The Terms of Reference set out the scope of the Committee in relation to Audit Activity, Regulatory Framework and Accounts.

The Audit Committee met on five occasions between April 2019 and March 2020, this included Internal Auditor and Local Government Audit representation (An open invitation is extended to Northern Ireland Audit Office to attend all meetings). Following each meeting, minutes are circulated and approved by Council.

The internal audit function for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is provided by both in-house Internal Audit and by Moore NI through an Internal Audit co-sourcing arrangement. This service was retendered during 2019-20.

Various aspects of operating activities were sampled and examined to ensure the appropriate legislation, policies and procedures were adhered to and expenditure was lawful. Internal audit reports include award of assurance levels and recommendations for improvement. These audit reports are presented to the Audit Committee throughout the year. The Internal Audit Service operates to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards 2013.

8. Ensuring compliance with relevant laws and regulations, internal policies and procedures, and that expenditure is lawful.

An In-house Legal Department was formed made up of one permanent solicitor and a paralegal. A second solicitor has been employed on a two year contract to address the priority 1 issue in relation to the registration of land on the Northern Ireland Audit Office Report to Those Charged with Governance. Previously the Council had a shared legal service plan with Derry City and Strabane District Council based on a Service Level Agreement (SLA) agreed by Council. The Council continue to use this specialist legal advice on occasion in respect of enforcement and dog fouling.

There remains the requirement for specialist legal advice on occasion in relation to corporate issues and human resources advice.

Internal policies and procedures are updated and renewed as and when required to reflect legislative changes and agreed recommendations by both Internal and External Auditors and are circulated to the relevant staff when reviewed. Internal Policies and Procedures would also be available on the Staff Intranet.

In terms of lawful expenditure, workshops and special council meetings are held to discuss the proposals for the Estimates for the forthcoming year. This covers both Capital and Revenue Expenditure. Internal audit and Local Government Annual reports (including statutory audit) are also examined and discussed at these meetings, as well as the meetings of the Audit Committee. Council are issued with a summary report which forms the basis for discussion and decision making at the meetings.

A standard report template is used for all committee reports, which includes a section to report on cost implications.

As previously mentioned, Council appointed Moore NI as part of a co-sourcing internal audit arrangement. The Internal Audit plan covers a range of Council's main activities, financial and otherwise. Various aspects of operating activities have been sampled and examined to ensure that appropriate legislation, policies and procedures are adhered to and expenditure is lawful. Internal audit reports including award of assurance levels and recommendations for improvement are reported to both Council and the Audit Committee.

In terms of service specific compliance, service departments are kept up to date in the following ways

- In house legal services
- Subscription to on line expertise e.g. HR - Legal-Island Email Service and Croners On-line Employment Law Information Service and Advice Line.
- Legal Advice when required - Council subscribe to DAS – Employment Advice as part of the annual Insurance programme.
- Officer Meetings – Service specific
- Various Forum
- Training and Development

The Clerk and Chief Executive is also the Council's Chief Financial Officer, as required by Section 1, of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. The Chief Financial Officer is charged with ensuring the lawfulness and financial prudence of decision making, providing advice, and guidance and ensuring that expenditure is incurred lawfully.

The financial management arrangements conform with the governance requirements of CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010) as set out in the Application Note to Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework. The CFO is also supported by suitably qualified and experienced staff (including qualified accountants) within the finance function to ensure that decisions made by the CFO are based on sound technical knowledge and understanding.

9. Whistle-blowing and other processes for receiving and investigating complaints from the public.

Council has a Whistle-Blowing policy and Anti-fraud, Bribe and Corruption Policy. Both policies were presented to the Audit Committee in June 2015 and approved by Council in July 2015. All staff were informed and copies of both documents are included in the Staff Induction Pack and also available on the Staff Intranet. Whistle-blowing is a standing item on the quarterly Audit Committee meetings.

Council also operates a formal scheme for public complaints and suggestions. These are referred to the relevant department and responded to within set deadlines, with the opportunity to have complaints referred to a higher level in the organisation where the complainant is not satisfied with the response. Where a complainant remains dissatisfied they are advised to contact the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

There were six notifications of whistleblowing complaints received and followed up by Internal Audit during the year all of which have been reported to the Audit Committee.

10. Identifying the development needs of Members and senior officers in relation to their strategic roles, supported by appropriate training.

Council has a limited training and development budget for both Members and Staff.

All relevant conferences and courses are circulated to Councillors at Council meetings. An Elected Members' Conference Attendance Policy was agreed by Council on 23rd February 2016.

Each Councillor has an allocated amount of money set aside for conferences and courses and capacity building. This covers course fees, travel and subsistence. This is monitored on a monthly basis to ensure the budget is not exceeded. This may include further education leading to a recognised qualification.

Council agreed an action plan for Elected Member Development. Council is working towards NI Charter for Elected Member Development. A training needs analysis was carried out for Elected Members and a programme of training agreed, which continues to be reviewed and further training arranged.

During the year two Councillors successfully achieved the ILM Endorsed Award for the NILGA Local Planning Leadership Programme. One Councillor received accreditation for the NILGA Elected Member Leadership Programme in October 2019. NILGA have advised Participants have 3 years from undertaking the course to complete the accreditation and other Councillors have been working with the facilitator to achieve this.

Alongside the Elected Member Development a Leadership and Management Development framework has been developed for Senior Officers. In addition a range of Strategic Learning and Development Priorities have been identified and learning is delivered and budgets allocated in accordance with these priorities. They are, Role Related training, Mandatory Training, Leadership & Management Development, Team Development & Core Skills, Further Education and Other.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council are progressing on a consistent and co-ordinated approach to learning and development.

11. Establishing clear channels of communication with all sections of the community and other stakeholders, ensuring accountability and encouraging open consultation.

Council consults with various bodies in relation to important strategic or policy development matters. Provisions are in place for communication in various formats and languages if requested.

Council has communicated with citizens and stakeholders by utilising the following methods:-

Community Planning Sessions – Strategic and Local, Establishment of Thematic Working Groups, Community Information events and Public Meetings, Statutory Partner Engagement, Citizen Surveys, Council Strategy, Website and Social Media, Council and Committee Meetings, Improved access to agenda, reports and minutes via website, Press Releases and Public Advertisements, Leaflets and Publications – including e-zine, and the bi-annual publication of the Citizens Newsletter.

Council meetings are open to the press and members of the public, and minutes are published on the Council's website and made available in public libraries and the Council Offices.

Council also received and responded to 722 Requests for Access to Information during 2019/20. The Council had no personal data breach incidents which were referred to the Information Commissioners Office.

Review of Effectiveness

The Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the Senior Managers within Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Internal Audit's Annual Report, and also by comments made by the external auditors

The Audit Committee which includes elected member representative of the political membership of Council and an Independent Member. Under the terms of reference for the Audit Committee, they are charged with responsibility for ensuring good stewardship of the Council's resources, and committed to making the Council, its working groups and departments more responsive to the audit function.

The Internal Auditor provides an independent opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control system. The Internal Auditor forwards draft reports to the relevant Director/Head of Service, for Management comments, and responses. The reports are co-ordinated by the Internal Auditor and then issued in their final format, presented to the Audit Committee initially and then to Council.

The Chief Executive has responsibility for preparing the Annual Governance Statement. In preparing this statement, he has considered the governance framework and system of internal controls in place. The Chief Executive leads the Council's SLT to collectively have involvement in and oversight of the processes involved in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework. In producing this statement, full regard has been made to the register of interest for both Councillors and employees, reports of the internal and external auditor and the Corporate Risk Register.

The following process has been applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework:

- **The Authority** - a committee structure was in place within Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council during 2019/20. A Finance Committee was added to the structure during 2019/20 to enhance the review and scrutiny of Council finances.
- **The Executive** – Service and Corporate Risk Registers, Operational Policies and Procedures, Regular Management Meetings and Communication, Internal and External Audit reports, Administrative procedures (including segregation of duties) and Management Supervision.
- **The Audit Committee** – The audit committee is a standing committee of Council, meeting quarterly, with 16 elected members and 1 independent member. All meetings attended by the Director of Corporate Services, relevant officers, Internal Audit and External Audit.
- **Internal Audit** – The Internal Audit function is carried out by a co-sourcing arrangement with an in-house auditor and an independent firm in accordance with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. It provides assurance and advisory service to assist Council achieve its objectives and improve the effectiveness of internal control, risk management and governance processes. Six internal audit assignments were carried out in 2019/20, plus a follow up review of the prior years recommendations.

- **other explicit review/assurance mechanisms**

Health and Safety: Reviews of Health and Safety by professional qualified officers, the Corporate Health and Safety Committee, and various Health and Safety sub committees.

External funding: throughout the year is subject to independent audits from relevant funders i.e. Europe, Government Departments, SEUPB etc.

Local Government Auditor: work carried out by the Local Government Auditor during 2019/20 is also used by the Council as an additional assurance mechanism.

CIPFA: undertook a review of the assumptions surrounding the rates setting process

The Chief Executive has been advised on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by the Audit Committee and a plan to address weaknesses and ensure continuous improvement of the systems is in place.

The Role of the Chief Financial Officer

The Chief Financial Officer is also the Chief Executive and as such is the key member of the Leadership Team, helping it to develop and implement strategy and to resource and deliver the Council's strategic objectives sustainably and in the public interest.

The Chief Financial Officer is actively involved in, and able to bring influence to bear on, all material business decisions to ensure immediate and longer term implications, opportunities and risks are fully considered, and aligned with the authority's financial strategy.

He leads the promotion and delivery of good financial management so that public money is safeguarded at all times and used appropriately, economically, efficiently and effectively.

Specifically he leads and directs the finance function, and is supported, in so doing, by professionally qualified and suitably experienced staff embedded within the Finance Department.

The Council is satisfied that appropriate financial management arrangements are in place in order to conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010) as set out in the Application Note to "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: A Framework".

Update on Significant Governance Issues that were declared in 2018/19

Seven governance issues were raised for 2018/19 and remain on the Corporate Risk Register for the current year. These included Financial Challenges, ICT systems, 'One-Off Projects, Information Governance, Asset Utilisation and Legal Challenges.

A significant governance issue for the Council during 2018/19 was a Judicial Review in relation to a proposed hotel development at Ballyreagh Road, Portstewart. A final Order was made at the High Court on 13th September to quash the decision of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council dated 5th March 2018 in relation to the grant of Planning Permission for a hotel and spa development at Ballyreagh Road, Portstewart.

Significant Governance Issues in 2019/20

The significant governance issues for 2019/20 were identified through the review of significant risks in the Corporate Risk Register for the year ending 31 March 2020, consideration of significant events, issues arising, internal and external audit reports.

In total, 6 areas across the Council were subject to Internal Audit during the year, with 5 receiving a satisfactory level of assurance, and 1 receiving a Call In by Council has not been awarded a rating. The recommendations contained within all of the Internal Audit reports have been accepted by Management and are being implemented during the 2020/2021 year, with a quarterly progress report on prior year recommendations presented to Audit Committee.

Internal Audit also undertook a review of prior year recommendations during June 2020. The review found that out of 88 prior year recommendations 39 issues had been addressed, 38 remained outstanding and 10 no response had been received. In total 49 prior year recommendations remain outstanding including recommendations in relation to budgetary control and risk management.

Following the judicial review Internal Audit undertook a piece of work to complete a review in relation to Council Land Easements and Disposals. This audit absorbed a lot of the internal audit resources for the year. Significant weaknesses were highlighted and recommendations for urgent attention were made in this report. This report was called in by Elected Members and the call-in opinion received in August 2020. In addition the Covid-19 outbreak in March resulted in the delay of Internal Audit Reports being finalised which resulted in Internal Audit being unable to complete its planned programme of work for the 2019/20 financial year.

The Annual Internal Audit Report and Annual Assurance Report for 2019/20 was presented to Audit Committee in June 2020. Based on audit work undertaken by Internal Audit during 2019/20, a limited assurance level has been awarded to the achievement of Council's objectives.

Internal Audit will continue to follow up on the legacy Internal Audit recommendations which have not been implemented and review progress made on the implementation of current year recommendations.

In addition to those areas, noted by Internal Audit above, the following governance issues have been identified:

1 Finances and Going Concern

Finance has been identified as a key risk in the corporate risk matrix. The Northern Ireland Audit Office in their audit strategy for 2019-20 have identified the financial position for the Council as a significant audit risk following two years where the Council's gross expenditure exceeded gross income, with an applied balance in 2019-20 resulting in a further reduction in the Council's Reserves.

During the year correspondence was received from the Minister for Communities, requesting further information on a range of concerns raised regarding Finance and Governance issues. Council have provided responses to the Department for Communities.

Prior to the rate setting process a number of cost saving measures were taken to Council to reduce expenditure and significantly increase Council's income generating activities.

Council agreed a budget for 2020-21 year at its Council meeting of February 2020 based on best estimates of expenditure and income at that time. The Covid-19 pandemic could not have been foreseen to this extent and was not therefore factored into the budgets agreed by Council.

SLT have commenced a detailed review of Council's budgets for the 2020-21 year. The Council has engaged with Central government seeking financial support. Budgets have been reviewed and significant steps taken to reduce expenditure, to maximise any available cost savings and income generating opportunities. Management Accounts has been noted in the Northern Ireland Audit Office Report to those charged with Governance as a priority 2 management letter point in terms of timescales, accuracy, detail and narrative.

2 Covid-19

On 16th March 2020, the UK Government announced its response to the Covid-19 outbreak. The advice on social distancing was to stop non-essential contact with others and to stop all unnecessary travel. At the time, Emergency Planning review was focused on the Council's response to Covid-19. The Corporate Risk Register was scrutinised with a specific focus on the impact of Covid-19.

Covid-19 has impacted on the Council's finances to date with the enforced closure of Leisure and Tourism facilities which has resulted in significant income losses. Additional costs have also been incurred in relation to the Covid-19 response such as the purchase of PPE, specialist cleaning materials, ICT equipment to facilitate working from home, adaptation of vehicles etc.

SLT anticipate that budgets will require continual monitoring and revision throughout the 2020-21 financial year. Finance has prepared a detailed cashflow and reviewed by SLT and with the Chief Executive to provide assurance as to Council's ability to continue as a going concern. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will remain the key focus for the Council as we work to recover from the pandemic throughout the Borough.

A recovery plan has been prepared by the Leisure and Development directorate and will be taken to an L & D workshop in July and subsequently to full Council in August 2020. Council will continue to address new regulatory requirements related to the pandemic and provide assistance in government assisted programs.

3 Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

With the Covid-19 pandemic resulting in a large-scale remote working and controls may not have been designed for the changed ways of working. There may be an increased security threat to the ICT systems from more sophisticated hacking and viruses, with security to information assets an increasing concern.

ICT are taking action to mitigate any increase security risk and are working on the roll out of a cloud-based services for a trial number of users within the Council.

4 Fraud and Raising Concerns.

In the reporting period, the Council received a number of whistleblowing concerns and complaints which have been reported to the Audit Committee and are being fully investigated by both Internal Audit and external consultancy firms. The Council's whistleblowing policy will be revised and updated in line with the Northern Ireland Audit Office raising concerns guide for the Northern Ireland public sector in the financial year.

In managing the risk of Fraud and Corruption (2014) the Council has adopted a fraud response plan that is appropriate for its fraud and corruption risk and remains committed to maintaining its vigilance to tackle fraud.

We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Signed



Clerk and Chief Executive
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Date :

Signed

Chair of the Council
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Date :

On behalf of the Audit Committee and by the Chief Executive

Certificate of the Chief Financial Officer

I certify that:

- (a) the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2020 on pages 31 to 85 has been prepared in the form directed by the Department for Communities and under the accounting policies set out on pages 72 to 85.
- (b) in my opinion the Statement of Accounts gives a true and fair view of the income and expenditure and cash flows for the financial year and the financial position as at the end of the financial year ending 31st March 2020.



David Jackson
Chief Financial Officer



Date :

Council Approval of Statement of Accounts

These accounts were approved by resolution of the Council on

Mark Fielding
Chair of the Council and Mayor



Date :