



Doncaster Council

Report

Date: 16th June 2020

To the Chair and Members of the Audit Committee
2019-20 DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Ros Jones	N/a	No

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. An annual review of the Council's governance arrangements and the subsequent preparation and publication of an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) are statutory requirements by virtue of the Accounts and Audit Regulations (England) 2015. The council's governance arrangements in place during 2019-20 have been reviewed and an Annual Governance Statement has been drafted which shows our governance compliance.
2. Last year the AGS contained 10 significant issues and due to the continued commitment to embed good governance we have effectively managed 6 significant issues and removed them from the AGS. During this year's process we have identified 3 new areas of significant risk and these have been added. This gives us a total of 7 key areas of focus on our current AGS, a reduction of 3 compared with last year.
3. Members are asked to note that the Draft Annual Governance Statement was prepared PRE coronavirus. The AGS assesses governance in place during 2019/20 so the majority of the year was unaffected by coronavirus. However coronavirus will have impacted on governance during March 2020 and going forward.

CURRENT POSITION

4. The current AGS shows the following:
 - 6 key areas of improvement have been completed or have been effectively managed to the extent that they were no longer significant. (Page 8-9)
 - 3 new significant issues arising from the 2019-20 review of effectiveness of the corporate governance arrangements and including the (Pages 4)
 - updates on the 4 key areas identified during previous years that remain an issue in 2019-20 (Pages 5-6).

5. Whilst the AGS consider the period 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020, it must also reflect any significant events or developments relating to the governance system that occur between the year-end and the date on which the Statement of Accounts are signed off which will not be until October 2020. The COVID-19 situation is present at the point of this draft Annual Governance Statement and is clearly a significant event for this Council and a challenge on its governance arrangements. At the point that the report is being considered in June 2020, the full impact of the pandemic is clearly not known. However its governance arrangements appear to have held strong during the response period and a detailed evaluation will be undertaken to consider the impact when the Annual Governance statement is finalised in October 2020 for consideration alongside the Statement of Accounts.
6. The Accounts and Audit Regulations require proper practice to be followed in the production and approval of the Statement. 'Proper practice' requires the Council Leader (in Doncaster's case, the Mayor) and the Chief Executive to sign the statement to confirm their satisfaction with the governance framework and the procedures for reviewing it, and their acceptance of the significant issues highlighted in the statement, along with actions for tackling the issues raised. This should be done prior to the publication of the Statement of Accounts by October 2020.

EXEMPT REPORT

7. Not Applicable

RECOMMENDATIONS

8. The Chair and Members of the Audit Committee are asked to review and endorse the initial outline of the draft Annual Governance Statement:
 - prior to being published for consultation as part of the Draft Accounts in June 2020 (revised timescales).

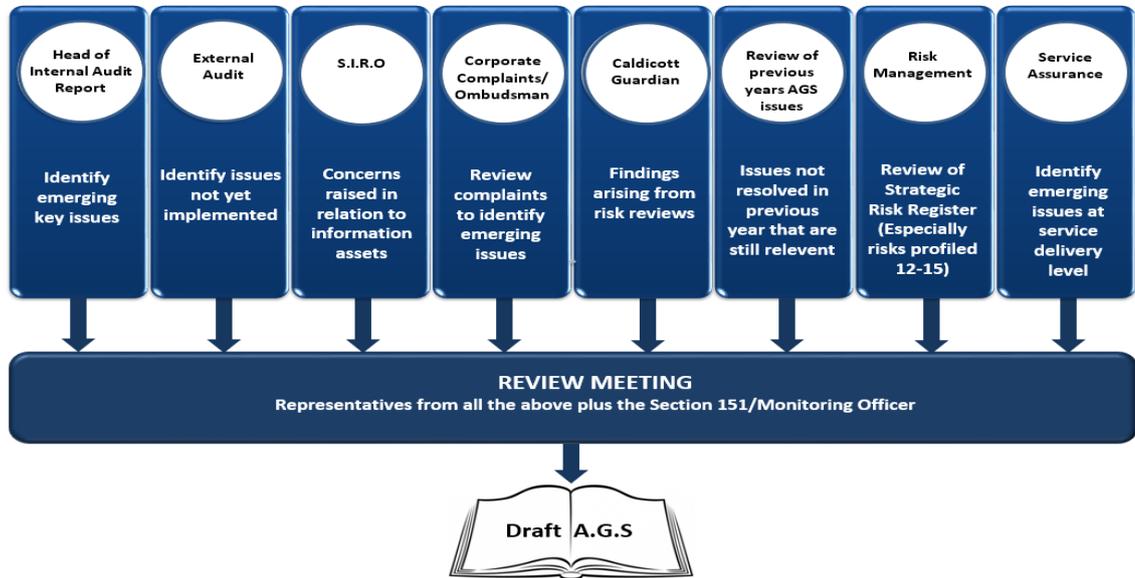
WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

9. By ensuring that there is good governance and a sound system of internal controls in place the Council will be able to provide the citizens of Doncaster with services that are provided in accordance with the law and proper standards. It will also ensure that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

BACKGROUND

10. The Council is required to prepare, approve and publish an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations and professional accounting practice. The Council must ensure that there is good governance and a sound system of internal controls in place.
11. Last year we have reviewed and simplified the process to amalgamate a top down and bottom up approach, whilst still maintaining confidence in the process. This simplified process was followed again this year and has helped sustain our continued commitment to embedding good governance and processes across the Council. Issues identified that make it onto the AGS are reviewed as part of the quarterly Resource Management cycle and any items that start to be a concern are elevated to the Governance Group. This allows the Council to react to emerging issues and possibly prevent entry onto a future AGS.

12. Pentana continues to be used to record compliance and/or areas for development and to provide updates for the quarterly Resource Management process
13. A review meeting considers relevant information from a diverse range of internal sources, as identified in the diagram below. This meeting facilitates the top down bottom up approach that will produce the 2019-20 Annual Governance Statement from the emerging issues.



14. The production of the AGS has been aligned with the production of the Head of Internal Audit report to allow them both to be considered at the same Audit Committee meeting.
15. The AGS document is a valuable means of communication. It enables the Council to explain its governance arrangements and how the controls it has in place manage risks of failure in delivering its outcomes.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

16. Not Applicable

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

17. Not Applicable

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

18.

	Outcomes	Implications
	<p>Connected Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A modern, efficient and flexible workforce • Modern, accessible customer interactions • Operating within our resources and delivering value for money • A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents • Building community resilience and 	<p>The Annual Governance Statement enables the Council to ensure that there is good governance and a sound system of internal controls in place</p>

	self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance 	
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RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

19. The production of an Annual Governance Statement is a statutory requirement. The key risk is that failure to produce a statement to meet this requirement would result in an adverse audit report by the Council’s external auditor and damage the Council’s reputation. The original risk profile is 16 but by producing the Annual Governance Statement and addressing key corporate issues the risk profile is reduced to 8.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials NC Date 12/3/20]

20. The production and publication of an Annual Governance Statement is a statutory requirement by virtue of Regulation 6(1)(b) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, following a review of the Council’s effectiveness of internal controls in terms of the exercise of its functions, financial and operational management and management of risk. The 2015 Regulations and the Council’s Constitution also require the findings of that review to be considered by the Audit Committee.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials AG Date 12/03/20]

21. There are no direct financial implications resulting from this report. The individual elements in the AGS will be subject to specific reporting as required.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials KG Date 11/03/20]

22. There are no specific human resources implications resulting from this statement

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials PW Date 13/03/20]

23. There are no specific technology implications arising from this report. As outlined in the draft AGS, good progress has been made to address historic data quality concerns in support of the DIPS programme with the remaining key areas due to go live between April and July 20. The extensive programme of work in relation to major technology upgrades has been successfully completed within the required timescales, ensuring they continue to be compliant, supported and secure

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials RS Date 13/03/2020]

24. Whilst there are no immediate health implications from the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) effective governance of civil institutions is a key prerequisite for Health and Wellbeing. Decision makers should consider the extent to which the AGS provides this assurance.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials SWr Date 10/03/2020]

25. In line with the corporate approach for compliance against the equality act 2011 due regard must be shown across all activity within the council. As the Annual Governance Statement draws together a diverse range of activities at a strategic level a due regard statement is not required. All the individual components that make-up the Annual Governance Statement may require a due regard statement to be completed and reported as and when appropriate.

CONSULTATION

26. Throughout this process consultation is undertaken with Heads of service, Directors, as well as assurance from key areas of governance, which supports the production of the final Annual Governance Statement.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

27. CIPFA/ SOLACE delivering good governance in Local Government Framework
Accounts and Audit Regulations (England) 2015.
2018-19 Annual Governance Statement
Annual Report of the Head of Internal Audit 2019-20

REPORT AUTHORS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

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Doncaster
Council

DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2019/20



Scope of responsibility

Doncaster Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. We also have a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, we are responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

Doncaster Council has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework '*Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*'. A copy of the Doncaster Council's Corporate Code of Governance is on our website at www.doncaster.gov.uk or can be obtained from The Strategy & Performance Unit, 01302 862533.

This statement explains how we have complied with the code and also meets the requirements of Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, regulation 4(3), which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an annual governance statement.

The purpose of the governance framework

The governance framework comprises of systems and processes, culture and values by which we are directed and controlled and our activities through which we account to, engage with and lead our communities. It enables us to monitor the achievements of our strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led us to delivery appropriate services that are value for money.

The system of internal control is a significant part of our 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. Our system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of our policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood and potential impact of those risks being realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

Whilst the AGS consider the period 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020, it must also reflect any significant events or developments relating to the governance system that occur between the year-end and the date on which the Statement of Accounts are signed off which will not be until October 2020. The COVID-19 situation is present at the point of the draft Annual Governance Statement and is clearly a significant event for this Council and a challenge on its governance arrangements. At the point that the report is being considered in June 2020, the full impact of the pandemic is clearly not known. However its governance arrangements appear to have held strong during the response period and a detailed evaluation will be undertaken to consider the impact when the Annual Governance statement is finalised in October 2020 for consideration alongside the Statement of Accounts.

Our Governance Framework

Audit Committee

Our Audit Committee is a key component of Doncaster Council's Corporate Governance. It provides an independent and high-level focus on the audit, assurance and reporting arrangements that underpin good governance and financial standards.

The purpose of our Audit Committee is to provide independent assurance to the Members on the adequacy of the risk management framework and the internal control environment. It provides an independent review of Doncaster Council's governance, risk management and control frameworks and oversees the financial reporting and annual governance processes. It oversees internal audit and external audit, helping to ensure efficient and effective assurance arrangements are in place.

The Committee has a programme of work in place to ensure it fulfils its responsibilities. The Committee has overseen and supported positive progress in a number of areas during the year, including:

- Helping to maintain and improve the Council's system of risk, governance and control by reviewing internal and external audit work carried out during the year;
- Supporting improvement in the Council's control arrangements by ensuring appropriate action is taken to implement audit recommendations and calling officers to account where explanations over any lack of progress are required;
- Critically assessing the Council's governance arrangements and supporting the production of an accurate Annual Governance Statement;
- Supporting the maintenance of the good standards achieved in producing the Council's Statement of Accounts, while meeting shorter timescales now required;
- Supporting the Council's antifraud and corruption arrangements and noting progress in this area as set out in the annual fraud report;
- Ensuring the Council's surveillance policies are kept up to date and reviewing surveillance carried out by the Council;
- Recognising the further improvements in Adults Services

The Audit Committee produces an Annual Report which is available [doncaster.gov.uk](https://www.doncaster.gov.uk)

Governance Group

The Group which is chaired by the Monitoring Officer leads on the development of governance arrangements at the Council and ensures the Council complies with best practice guidance issued by CIPFA / SOLACE and any other sector-leading advice.

Role of Internal and External Audit

The council has both internal and external auditors. Internal Audit and External Audit aim to coordinate their work to get best value from the resources in use and to do this aim to work closely together to achieve our objectives.

The role of Internal Audit is to:

- give independent assurance that risk, governance and control
- alert managers to areas of potential weakness and to make recommendations for improvements
- give unbiased professional advice on policies, procedures, practices and systems
- All councils are subject to ongoing scrutiny by External Audit and their role is to:

- Review the accuracy and completeness of the Council's financial accounts and specified grant claims submitted for payment to various Government Departments
- Review the Council's arrangements for the achievement of economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of its resources, in accordance with Best Value principles.

Grant Thornton were appointed as External Auditors to the Council for the 2018/19 audit onwards and in their first annual report, presented to Audit Committee in July 2019 they gave an "unqualified audit opinion" on the Council's financial statements for 2018/19 and an unqualified Value for Money (VFM) conclusion for 2018/19. This is consistent with the opinions provide by the Councils previous external auditors, KPMG Internal Audit were able to provide a positive opinion in their annual report for 2019/20, which alongside the good VFM conclusion, indicates there is sound, risk governance and control arrangements in place.

Overall the Grant Thornton annual report is an extremely positive one as it has been in previous years and with the "unqualified audit opinion", recognises the further improvements that have been made by the Council in preparing the Statement of Accounts for audit. The quality of the working papers and the supporting information has improved year-on-year with the working papers, once again, meeting the standards specified in the Accounts Audit Protocol with a clear audit trail provided and responses to audit queries were provided in a timely manner. Audit trail provided and responses to audit queries were provided in a timely manner.

Our Approach to Risk Management

Doncaster Council recognises that risk management is an integral part of good governance and management practice.

Managing our risks effectively contributes to the delivery of the strategic and operational objectives of the authority. Doncaster Council manages risks via a Risk Management Framework that has been designed to provide structure and guidance to support our organisation, and the individuals within it, to take positive risks in an informed way.

Review of effectiveness

Doncaster Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the Effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The Strategy and Performance Unit led the Annual Governance review.

The review of effectiveness is derived from two perspective, corporate and service areas. The corporate perspective is taken from existing intelligence proved by colleagues holding key governance position within the authority including the Head of Internal Audit, the Caldicott Guardian, Senior information Risk Owner, Section 151 Officer and the monitoring Officer. The current strategic risk register and complaints received are also reviewed. The service area perspective is proved by each Head of Service via a series of governance statements in the form of a self-assessment.

We have been advised on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by the Executive Board and Audit Committee, and that the arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework. The areas already addressed and those to be specifically addressed with new actions planned are outlined on the following pages.

Significant governance issues identified in 2019-20

Whilst we are satisfied with the effectiveness of corporate governance arrangements and systems of internal control, as part of our continued efforts to improve governance the following new issues have been identified for improvement as part of the 2019-20 Annual Governance Statement process:

<p>ISSUE: Assurance over Financial Resilience and Service Sustainability in response to COVID 19</p> <p>Whilst the Council's governance arrangements currently appear to have held strong during the COVID-19 response period, our financial position is exposed and dependent upon central government full reimbursing it for the cost incurred in implementing the government's instruction in awarding grants etc.</p>	
<p>Actions: Financial and governance uncertainty will require Doncaster Council to reconsider financial forecasts, resilience and governance arrangement currently in place to support its ongoing recovery during these uncertainties for a period of at least 12 months from the date of approved audited financial statements</p> <p>Responsible Officer: Debbie Hogg – Director of Corporate Resources</p>	<p>Completion Date: March 2021</p>
<p>ISSUE: Governance Functions</p> <p>An improvement area has been identified around knowledge and understanding of various key governance policies and procedures that are in place to help support senior managers with their roles and responsibilities E.g. Financial Procedures Rules and Corporate Procurement Strategy.</p>	
<p>Actions: A series of mandatory training sessions will be developed and rolled out for all senior staff (down to Head of service) to attend to improve awareness of key governance policies, procedures and arrangements that are in place to support senior's managers</p> <p>Responsible Officer: Scott Fawcus - Assistant Director Legal & Democratic Services</p>	<p>Completion Date: December 2020</p>
<p>ISSUE: Data Quality Arrangements within the Assistive Technology Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to maintain daily assurance arrangements to ensure that each call has been dealt with and responded correctly, according to established procedures. • New charging protocols rollout, planned to commence in April 20 • Data cleansing exercise to be completed as part of the rollout of the new charging protocols • Managing new contract arrangements to be issued to new service users from April 20 • Ensure vulnerable service users are taking correct decisions relating to their new contract arrangements from April 20 	
<p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain current daily assurance arrangements during implementation and post implementation phase of ARC/ HEART review • Introduce phased approach to implementation from April 20 to October 20, including a data cleansing exercise and issuing new contracts with a dedicated resource team. • Ensure the cohort of vulnerable service users are identified and a strengths based conversation takes place to ensure their best interests are maintained prior to variation or cancellation of the service. <p>Responsible Officers: Debbie John-Lewis - Assistant Director Communities, Bill Hotchkiss – Head of Service Community Safety, Lisa Rockcliff Registered Manager</p>	<p>Completion Date: October 2020</p>

An update on Key Improvement Areas that were previously identified and remain an issue in 2019-20

<p>ISSUE: Adult Social Care Market Sustainability</p> <p>The potential impacts of this fragile market includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provider failure and associated disruption of care for people of Doncaster • Lack of investment from providers to develop services and innovate together with potential contraction of existing offer • Restricted choice of services and the providers of services for people of Doncaster 	
<p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to support the market to make informed commercial and service planning decisions in order to stimulate a sustainable, diverse social care market to meet the current and future needs of the people of Doncaster. This will be primarily delivered through updating and reviewing the impact of published (April 2020) 'Market Position Statement' • Implement year two of the 2019-2021 Joint Health and Social Care Commissioning • Progress The establishment of a Voluntary Community and Faith (VCF) Sector Cooperative to provide strong voice and representation, infrastructure support and a point of access for commissioning/partnership working. • Develop a locality approach to commissioning of services as part of the 'One Council' Locality Working Programme • Develop and maintain an ongoing awareness of local business environment for providers, providers business models and other intelligence to inform commissioning actions • Ongoing engagement with providers through partnership arrangements, contract management and contract monitoring activity to maintain oversight of the social care market in Doncaster <p>Responsible Officer: Rupert Suckling – Director of Public Health Mark Wakefield - Head of Service Commissioning and Contracts</p>	<p>Completion Date: March 2021</p>

<p>ISSUE: Organisational Workforce</p> <p>Within this context the council needs to ensure it has the right people, with the right skills, working in the right way, within effective roles, programmes and flexible structures. This brings a series of core behaviours and key competencies that are needed to address both capacity and capability issues within the organisation to successfully drive through performance.</p> <p>As an organisation we need to systematically identify and address critical skills gaps now and for the future; develop and deploy resources to ensure services can be delivered to a high standard and are value for money.</p> <p>There are already a number of current and emerging recruitment difficulties and skill shortages for certain occupational groups, in particular IT, adult social workers and occupational therapists, which need to be addressed.</p>	
<p>Actions: To be monitored and addressed through priority actions included in this year's workforce strategy 2020/21, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Development and implementation of a Recruitment and Resourcing Policy, focusing on effective ways of recruiting people with the right attitude and behaviours and a more flexible model for the types of skill needed · Attracting and engaging a talented workforce including apprenticeship and 	<p>Completion Date: March 2021</p>

graduate talent · Ensuring leadership development and learning programmes meet current needs including increased horizon scanning of future skills requirements Responsible Officer: Jill Parker – Assistant Director - HR, Communications & Executive Office	
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ISSUE: Data Quality Arrangements
An improvement area has been identified around the quality of historic data, as well as resilience of current plans to embed a good data quality culture. It is important to ensure that historic data being migrated between information systems is of good quality. Proposals were approved to make resources available to address these areas.

Actions: Good progress has been made to address historic data quality concerns, particularly in support of the DIPS programme. A refreshed data quality strategy and policy were developed during 2019/20, as well as a revised e-learning and classroom training suite to support sustained improvements. Data quality will remain a focus area in the policy, insight and change unit into 2020/21. The Data Quality Project Board, comprising colleagues from across the organisation, continues to oversee delivery of data quality improvements. Alongside improvements led by this board, a self-assessment toolkit, currently in development, will support proactive identification and resolution of data quality problems by teams across the council. Responsible Officer: Lee Tillman – Assistant Director of Strategy & Performance	Completion Date: Ongoing
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ISSUE: Doncaster Integrated People System (DIP's)
The implementation of an integrated technology solution for Adult and Children Social Care and Education Management highlighted previously has achieved Education Management deliverables and the remaining key areas are due to go live. Due to its importance and how it will change these services and ways of working, it is remaining as a key issue to monitor.

Actions: Due to the Covid situation, some of the timescales have had to be delayed or changed. New Children's Social Care Management solution to go live in September 2020 used by the Council, Doncaster Children's Services Trust and other key partners. New Adult Social Care Management solution to go live in February 2021 used by the Council and key partners. Some Education Management deliverables have been achieved and further will be phased through to Autumn 2020. Many key integrations with other key systems including joining up with health, financials etc. to go live May to July 2020. Citizen, Professional & Provider Portals to go live July 2020. Responsible Officer: Julie Grant – Assistant Director of Customers, Digital & ICT	Completion Date: March 2021
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Statement of Commitment

We have been advised of the implications of the result of the 2019-20 review of the effectiveness of the governance and internal control frameworks by the Audit Committee and of the plans to address identified weaknesses and ensure continuous improvement of the system in place. We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to enhance further the Council's governance and internal control arrangements.

We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and that we will monitor their implementation and operation over the next year and as part of our next annual review of effectiveness.

Signed on behalf of Doncaster Council:

Ros Jones
Mayor of Doncaster

Damian Allen
Chief Executive

Key Areas of Improvement from previous Statements that have been completed

There are a numbers of areas requiring improvement that have been identified in previous statements that have been effectively managed to the extent that they are no longer significant in 2019-20. These are:

- ❖ **Alarm Receiving Centre** - Following the implementation of a new system and previous remediation work, there was an ongoing practice and service standard issues, which highlight areas of risk and where being addressed through the implementation of a Rapid Improvement Plan. The Improvement plan remains in place, together with daily reassurance meetings.
- ❖ **Financial Challenges within Adults Health and Wellbeing** - Adult's services are facing increasing demographic and service financial pressures. This is currently underpinned & funded by short term funding sources such as Better Care Fund. Doncaster is not alone in experiencing these challenges and like many other council's we needed to find effective solutions to support individuals live as well and independent life as they possibly can. While we are still facing increasing demographic and service financial pressures, Strong progress has been made in recent years across the service that have included; embedding strength-based practice and evidence that this has improved experience both for Doncaster people and front-line staff; the introduction of a new case management system that will reduce bureaucracy, increase productivity and give staff more time to focus on prevention; Effective performance, finance and management information is produced regularly and is presented and discussed at a range of senior management meetings and the new Joint commissioning arrangements with health partners are being progressed and a new commissioning structure is being implemented.
- ❖ **Major Technology upgrade requirements** - Major Technology upgrade requirements - Most of our technology both council wide and across the key partners we provide technology to, had to be upgraded by January 20 to ensure they all continue to be compliant, supported and secure. Also a significant cost increase of licensing from 2019-20 meant we needed to revisit to achieve value for money. Both these issues initiated an extensive programme of work to move significant technology used into the Cloud so it is more cost efficient and implement the extensive upgrade of all servers, systems and desktops as required. This extensive programme of work has now been completed.
- ❖ **Doncaster Children's Services Trust** - Doncaster Children's Services Trust governance model changed on the 1st April moving from a wholly owned independent company to an ALMO (Arm's Length Management Organisation). This model was supported by the Secretary of State for Education as the preferred approach which allows operational independence whilst at the same time providing financial security. As we move into Phase 2 of the organisational

maturity it'll be important to maintain focus on its core activities to deliver better outcomes for children, young people families and ensure that the Trust remains efficient and sustainable in the medium and longer term. The new governance and Board arrangements to support the ALMO structure was established 1 April 2019. Performance metrics have been reviewed and updated and a revised performance monitoring and reporting contact has been established and continues to work well.

- ❖ **The Local Plan – I** The Council needs to have updated policies and allocations in line with national planning policy and legislation to ensure central government do not intervene to prepare a plan on our behalf. Following the Publication of the Local Plan in August 2019, the representations received have been summarised, evaluated and discussed and no significant new issues were identified. The Local Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in March 2020 and the Secretary of State has appointed an independent examiner. The dates of the examination hearings are yet to be agreed but are likely to commence in the spring with the aim of adopting the Plan by winter 2020.
- ❖ **General Significant Financial Challenges - Issue:** The Council faced a number of significant financial challenges which if not managed carefully in 2019/20 could potentially lead to an overspend position and a reduction in the level of general reserves, the Council also needed to produce a balanced budget plan for 2020/21, to meet the forecast budget gap estimated. At quarter 3, the Council is forecasted a year-end underspend of £1.3m. This is a positive position and demonstrates the continued effort to manage the significant cost reductions in 2019/20. Planned savings for 2019/20 are largely on track with £17.5m expected to be delivered, leaving a projected shortfall of £1.4m. Given the ongoing funding uncertainty facing local government we will need to be ever more diligent to ensure managers form value for money decisions when making spending decisions and delivering or commissioning services. In addition the leadership will continue to exercise effective stewardship of the council resources this will continued to be monitored throughout the year.