Annual Governance Statement 2021/22

Scope of responsibility

1. Vale of White Horse District Council ensures that its business is conducted legally and to proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded, accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. Under the Local Government Act 1999 the council makes arrangements for continuous improvement, with a view to economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The council must make arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating effective exercise of functions, including the management of risk.

2. The council has corporate governance arrangements and has adopted a local code of governance. This code is consistent with the "*Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*" publication by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, published in 2007. During 2021-22, the local code was being redrafted to reflect updated CIPFA guidance that was revised in 2016 and will be introduced for the 2022/23 financial year.

3. This Annual Governance Statement explains how the council has complied with its code of governance, and how it met the requirements of regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 in relation to an annual review of the effectiveness of the council's systems of internal control, and the preparation and approval of this statement.

4. Our website at www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk has a copy of the local code of corporate governance within its Constitution or it can be obtained from:

    Democratic Services
    Vale of White Horse District Council
    Abbey House,
    Abbey Close,
    Abingdon,
    OX14 3JE
    Tel. 01235 422520
    Email: democratic.services@southandvale.gov.uk

The purpose of the governance framework

5. The governance framework comprises the systems, processes, culture and values which direct and control the council, and activities through which it accounts to, engages with, and leads the community. The framework enables the council to monitor achievement of its strategic objectives and consider whether appropriate and cost-effective services have been delivered by those objectives.

6. The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It is not possible to eliminate all risk of failure to achieve the council's objectives and therefore the framework can only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. An ongoing internal control process is employed, which is designed to identify and prioritise risks to the achievement of the council's objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks, and mitigate their impact.

7. The council has had the governance framework described below in place for the year ended 31 March 2022.

The governance framework

8. Full Council is responsible for directing and controlling the organisation through the governance framework, doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, and in a timely manner. Full Council's responsibilities include agreeing the Constitution and key governance documents and agreeing the policy framework and the budget.

9. The council has executive arrangements in place consisting of a cabinet, a scrutiny committee and a joint scrutiny committee with South Oxfordshire District Council. Where this document refers to joint proceedings, this will be with South Oxfordshire District Council unless stated otherwise. Cabinet is responsible for proposing the budget and policy framework and implementing them once approved by Council. The scrutiny function allows a committee to question and challenge the policy and performance of Cabinet and promote public debate.

10. The Chief Executive advises councillors on policy and procedures to drive the aims and objectives of the council. As head of paid service, the Chief Executive oversees the employment and conditions of staff. The Chief Executive leads a senior management team, shared with South Oxfordshire District Council. The Chief Finance Officer, the Monitoring Officer, Deputy Chief Executives and Heads of Service are responsible for advising Cabinet and scrutiny committees on legislative, financial and other policy considerations to achieve the council's objectives. These officers are responsible for implementing councillors' decisions.

11. The governance framework for 2021/22 was based on the council's code of governance. This aims to meet the principles of good governance in all aspects of its work, with careful attention to the following main principles:
     - Focusing on the council's purpose and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area
     - Councillors and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles

- Promoting values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour
- Taking informed and transparent decisions, which are subject to effective scrutiny
- Managing risks
- Developing the capacity and capability of councillors and officers to be effective
- Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability

Review of effectiveness of the governance framework

12. The council has responsibility for reviewing, at least annually, the effectiveness of its governance framework, including the system of internal control. This review is informed by the work of managers who have responsibility for the upkeep of the governance environment, the internal audit manager's annual report, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

13. The following section sets out tables showing:
    - the governance issues affecting the council;
    - how the council has tackled these issues in 2021/22 and the controls it has in place to ensure good governance; and
    - any actions identified to improve the council's governance.

The strategic planning framework

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
1	How does the council ensure it undertakes its responsibilities correctly?	The Council follows CIPFA guidance on good governance. Openness, accountability and stakeholder consultation are key to this and incorporated in the corporate plan and embedded into working practices. To undertake responsibilities correctly, the Council consults stakeholders as well as adhering to the law and regulatory responsibilities. The Strategic Planning Framework incorporates residents' and service-providers' views, as well as national and local priorities. The council periodically conducts a residents' survey to ensure the council's objectives reflect residents' priorities. In 2021-22, a Joint Communications and Engagement Strategy was formed and reviewed at scrutiny committee ahead of Cabinet meetings in April 2022. Recent surveys, consultations and engagement reports are published on the website. Public consultations link The Local code of governance has been reviewed during 2021-22. The Constitution sets out how Vale of White Horse district council operates, how decisions are made and the rules and procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. This includes statutory responsibilities and those of the Council's choosing. This remains under regular review, with the latest update reviewed in March 2022 and published on 1 April 2022. Constitution link The process for the preparation of the annual governance statement has been reviewed during 2021-22.	To implement annual action plans for the new Joint Communications and Engagement Strategy. Approval of updated code of governance Approval of updated annual governance statements process / assurance statements
2	Where are the council's corporate priorities?	During 2020, the public were successfully consulted on the new Corporate Plan 2020-24, which has 6 key themes. Results were published in October 2020 and the Corporate Plan was adopted at a Full Council meeting in October 2020. The corporate delivery plan progress was monitored and reported on a quarterly basis, and during this period, 3 quarterly reports were published and reviewed by Scrutiny Committee, the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee (CEAC) (the relevant	To continue to monitor progress of the Corporate Plan 2020-24 and make any necessary improvements as a

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
		sections) and Cabinet, with Cabinet member responsible taking on board comments for improvements with responsible officers. Corporate plan link The themes in the plan are: 1. Providing the homes people need 2. Tackling the Climate Emergency 3. Building healthy communities 4. Building stable finances 5. Working in partnership 6. Working in an open and inclusive way	result of the monitoring process.
3	How does the council address issues beyond its legal control and geographic limits?	The council works with external organisations and partners to address local and wider issues. This is done through either joint committees, formal partnerships or more informal liaison with other service providers. Examples of the bodies include: • Future Oxfordshire Partnership and its advisory groups: Oxfordshire Plan 2050, Infrastructure, Housing, Environment • Enterprise Zones • Oxford-Cambridge Arc • South and Vale Community Safety Partnership • Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Continue partnership work and consider new partnership arrangements that benefit local people and help the council to address and input into issues that affect it and are outside of geographical and legal control.
4	What other key strategic planning strategies does the council have?	The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1 was adopted at Full Council in December 2016; and Local Plan 2031 Part 2 was adopted by Full Council in October 2019. A Local Plan Part 1 review (LPP1) took place (5-year review) and on 3 December 2021 was approved by Cabinet. Adoption statements and evidence base and Local Plan review can be found here In March 2021 Full Council decided to prepare the next Local Plan as a joint plan with South Oxfordshire District Council. During 2021-22, the Joint Local Plan Governance arrangements were established, which were first approved in August 2020. The current version can be located here: Joint Local Plan governance arrangements	To work with Oxfordshire principal councils to progress the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. Continue consultation process at key stages with scrutiny overview

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
		The council has also taken part in the development of the draft Oxfordshire Plan 2050 with other councils across Oxfordshire through the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP). During 2021-22, Cabinet approved the Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire in April 2021, and approved the launch of the Oxfordshire Plan Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation at a Cabinet meeting in July 2021. Following this, the Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation results were reviewed along with a statement of community involvement, through scrutiny committee in early February 2022 and then the following Cabinet meeting, with comments and recommendations provided to the Cabinet member, who would feedback to FOP.	

The performance management framework

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
5	How does the council set performance targets to achieve its strategic objectives?	In the Corporate Plan 2020-24, the council has set performance targets to achieve its strategic objectives and corporate priorities. A corporate delivery plan ensures that the council meets targets and achieves objectives. This is monitored by Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet and a report is published on a quarterly basis. A yearly summary is expected with quarter 4, which will be published in the 2022-23 period. The council shares its Senior Management Team and staff with South Oxfordshire District Council. This brings efficiencies for the council. As of 1 April 2020, the management structure includes a Chief Executive, three Deputy Chief Executives and seven heads of service posts. As of February 2022, a review of operational structure was conducted in response to some vacant posts and retirement, to see if there was opportunity to drive corporate priorities and ensure the right and appropriate balance of responsibilities were held amongst heads of service. Joint working has many benefits for both councils where there are many shared visions, priorities and projects.	To monitor the progress of Corporate Plan delivery in the year 2022-23 Continued flexibility of staffing and assessment of resource distribution when needed.

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
		Service areas have service plans to implement objectives and meet targets. Staff have individual workplans and targets, ensuring that they work towards achieving a *golden thread* that aligns the council's top-level objectives to the work of each council officer. Managers are responsible to ensure these have been met.	Continue to align service area and staff priorities with corporate priorities
6	How does the council monitor performance against key targets?	The Senior Management Team receive regular board reports, which monitor performance of key measures. Analysis of the board report demonstrates that the council is meeting most of the key performance measures. In addition, the analysis shows a long-term, on-going trend of improvement. Staff performance objectives and reviews will link with the new corporate objectives. New process for one-to-one manager reviews was implemented in this period. Let's Talk is the new performance management process, set up to assist the continuous and constructive conversations with supervisors/managers, mutual accountability, openness and building team relationships. Quarterly corporate plan monitoring as mentioned.	To ensure the presentation of the board report is kept under review to measure performance against the strategic objectives. Board report process review underway for 2022-23. To continue to implement performance monitoring of the Corporate Plan and external contractors.
7	Does the council monitor its performance against others?	Benchmarking work has been completed by Insight and Policy team. Horizon scanning enables the council to look ahead to upcoming changes, opportunities and challenges. The council works collaboratively with Oxfordshire County Council and local district councils to share ideas and new initiatives. The council monitors its performance nationally, for example, recycling rates, employment figures etc. For example, for recycling – Vale was 4th highest local authority in 21-22 at 62.6%	To continue to review the council's performance with benchmarking work. Continue to look out for new opportunities and good initiatives

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
8	How does the council monitor its contractors' performance?	The council operates a formal framework for monitoring contractors' performance and has officers monitoring performance on a regular basis. For the major contracts, monitoring reports are submitted to the Joint Scrutiny Committee and a report is made to the relevant Cabinet member. Officers work closely with contractors to ensure timely data reporting. Examples are Biffa waste management, Saba Car parking and Capita contracts. All data on key performance indicators (KPIs) is collected and presented by officers and undergoes scrutiny review. For corporate contracts with Capita, Vale has membership to a Joint Committee to monitor the contracts under the Five Councils Partnership. The same standards of the council are expected of contractors and this is challenged through regular review, as well as highlighting achievement and improvement.	To continue to scrutinise contractors' performance and use feedback to improve where needed and possible.

The legal framework

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
9	How does the council ensure it is acting lawfully?	The council employs a Monitoring Officer, who is responsible for ensuring the council acts lawfully. The Monitoring Officer will report directly to full Council or to Cabinet where it is considered that any proposal, decision or omission would give rise to unlawfulness, or to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee, if any decision or omission has given rise to maladministration. During 2021-22 the Council welcomed a new Monitoring Officer.	
10	How does the council ensure lawful decision-making? Does it have proper procedures in place?	The council's Constitution sets out how decision-making is managed and guides decision-making towards objectives and includes a set of procedure rules that govern how the council conducts its business. The Constitution also includes protocols covering the disclosure of interests in contracts and the relationship between officers and councillors.	. Continued review of Constitution

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
		The Monitoring Officer is responsible for ensuring the lawfulness of decision-making and maintaining the Constitution. The Constitution sets out the terms of reference to each committee and the level of delegated authority to officers. The Constitution is currently under review with the Joint Constitution Review Task Group (comprising of councillors from both councils) commencing the review in January 2022. During 2020-21, the Coronavirus pandemic resulted in temporary legislation that allowed councils to legally hold formal meetings virtually. This allowed the council to hold virtual meetings between 4 April 2020 and 6 May 2021. During 2021-22, the temporary legislation was removed. Since then, the council has contributed to evidence gathering in response to a call for a legislation change to allow virtual or hybrid meetings to be a legal option for holding formal meetings. The council has adapted to hold informal meetings virtually and hold formal meetings in person with protective measures in place for attendees. Accessibility is improved by the live streaming of public meetings via Microsoft Teams and YouTube.	Planning is underway for 2022/23 due to an office move, alternative venues are being sought with continued hybrid arrangements to benefit attendees. Continued monitoring of legislative changes and updating any relevant process and documents for the council.
11	Does the council have a leader and a cabinet?	The Council appoints a leader, having adopted the 'strong leader' model under the Part 3 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The leader has delegated authority to Cabinet members to make decisions within a given remit. Individual Cabinet member decisions (ICMD) are recorded and published. Any key decisions taken by Cabinet, an individual Cabinet member or an officer are subject to the council's scrutiny call-in procedure, which is set out in the council's Constitution.	Training that covers ICMD and call-in procedures in 22/23

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
12	Do officer reports to council meetings contain legal advice?	All officer reports to the Council, Cabinet or committee meetings contain a section on the legal implications of taking a decision. All draft reports are subject to consultation with Senior Management Team, legal and finance officers before publication. Officers were trained in report writing in 2021/22.	Officer training in 22/23 to strengthen report writing, with advice, including request to submit legal advice requests in good time to enable through review by Legal.
13	How does the council ensure councillors uphold strong ethical standards?	The council's Constitution incorporates the Councillors' Code of Conduct, which requires high standards of conduct. The Monitoring Officer provides training to councillors on compliance with the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

The council has appointed a pool of six independent persons to advise the Monitoring Officer and councillors on Code of Conduct complaint and the Monitoring Officer has recommended a new procedure for investigating complaints under the Code which has been adopted. Code of conduct complaints are recorded and managed accordingly, and a yearly report is provided to Joint Audit and Governance Committee on complaints and their outcomes. The report sent in this period can be found here.

On 29 March 2022, an Oxfordshire Model Code of Conduct was approved for adoption by the Joint Audit and Governance Committee (this has since been adopted by both councils with immediate effect). | Councillor Code of Conduct to be implemented and training will be provided to councillors by the Monitoring Officer. |
| 14 | Does the council's legal team meet the high-quality standards? | Lexcel is the Law Society's accreditation quality mark. This has been awarded to the council's legal team, which undergoes a rigorous independent assessment each year to ensure that it meets the required standards of excellence in areas such as customer care, case management and risk management. The legal team passed the Annual Maintenance Visit (AMV1) on 6 Feb 2020. The assessment for 2021 took place on 22 June 2021 (AMV2) and a two-day Full Assessment which | To continue to ensure the council meets the Law Society's Lexcel accreditation quality mark. |

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
		took place on 24th and 25th February 2022 was awarded an excellent review "with a high level of compliance against the Lexcel standard".	

The financial framework

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
15	How does the council ensure correct financial procedures?	The council appoints a Section 151 Officer, who is responsible for the overall management of its financial affairs. The Section 151 Officer determines all financial systems, procedures and supporting records of the council, after consultation with Acting Deputy Chief Executives and Heads of Service. Any new or amended financial systems, procedures or practices are agreed with the Section 151 Officer before implementation. 2021/22 saw the successful implementation of updated Unit4 financial software for the council, together with the insourcing of the exchequer functions to a new team. Click the following link to access published finances Our Finances	Ongoing development of the financial systems to support more efficient working practices and to aid financial management
16	How do councillors and officers work together to ensure financial accountability?	Cabinet and the Senior Management Team exercise collective responsibility for financial matters. All members of the Senior Management Team accept individual and collective responsibility for the use of resources and financial accountability. Senior Management Team supports Cabinet in the budget-setting process before Cabinet recommends the budget to full Council. In 2021/22 the chief executive and chief finance officer engaged with Cabinet to agree an approach to budget setting for 2022/23 that would give the council a more stable financial footing. This led to an in-depth budget challenge process, involving both officers and cabinet members, that enabled a balanced budget to be set for 2022/23. It also led to a reduction in the forecast use of reserves in future years, meaning a five-year Medium Term Financial Plan that was balanced over its duration could also be agree. Portfolio holders have meetings with senior operational managers on developments in their area. Officers provide briefings and information to assist Portfolio holders in their role.	Further budget challenge activity in setting the 2023/23 budget

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
		All councillor briefings are held to keep members up to date on developments.	
17	Who approves the budget?	Full Council is responsible for setting the budget and the council tax. The budget setting includes the revenue budget for the forthcoming year, and the capital programme for the forthcoming five-year period. The Council also approves a medium-term financial plan for the next five years and a capital strategy for the forthcoming ten-year period. This ensures better long-term financial planning. The Section 151 Officer reports to Council on the robustness of the budget of the financial estimates and the adequacy of reserves. The Council approved its council tax, capital programme and revenue budget for 2022-23 on 16 February 2022, also treasury management and capital strategies were reviewed - the meeting details are here	
18	Does the council share resources to save costs?	To save costs, the council shares its staff and office resources with South Oxfordshire District Council. The council has several joint contracts to achieve efficiency savings. During 21-22, the councils approved production of a joint local plan. The agreed proposal for the South Oxfordshire owned new office building is cost effective for both councils and saves money in future, for both councils who will share the space. In 2022/23 the rental of the Milton Park property will cease as it no longer meets our needs. The council's office headquarters aim to move to The Abbey House in Abingdon until the new office is built in Didcot.	To continue to find ways of sharing costs in 2022-23 Implementation of a Joint Local Plan with South Oxfordshire will save costs in future. Ongoing efficiencies from office reorganisation and hybrid working.
19	How does the council manage its financial investments?	Full Council is responsible for approving the Treasury Management Strategy. This governs the operation of the council's treasury function and is reviewed at least annually or when otherwise necessary. This strategy includes parameters for lending and borrowing and identifies the risks of treasury activity. The Joint Audit and Governance Committee and Cabinet review the draft strategy proposals before they are recommended to Council. The Joint Audit and Governance	

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
		Committee and Cabinet review the operation of the current strategy with mid-year and end of year monitoring reports, which are also recommended to Council. The strategy for 2021-22 was presented to JAGC, Cabinet and Council in late January to early February 2022 link to treasury management	
20	Once the budget is set, how is it implemented?	Cabinet has overall responsibility for the implementation of the council's financial strategies and spending plans. It is authorised to make financial decisions, subject to these being consistent with the budget and policy framework and the Constitution. Cabinet receives periodic budget monitoring reports. Heads of service are required to provide reasons for budget variances; these recorded in the budget monitoring report. In year budget virements can be considered as set out in the Constitution. This ensures that the council is able to realign resources to ensure that over- or underspends do not impact on its ability to deliver services. In exceptional circumstances, as experienced during 2020-21 with the Coronavirus pandemic, the budget may need to be increased in year. This increase must be agreed by full council.	To present regular budget monitoring reports to Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.
21	How are finances managed at service level?	Deputy Chief Executives and Heads of Service are responsible for ensuring the proper maintenance of financial procedures and records, and the security of assets, property, records, and data within their service area, and for ensuring that the services that they are responsible for are delivered within budget.	
22	Is the management of budgets subject to audit?	Internal Audit conducts a periodic review of the council's budgetary control and considers budget implications in any review undertaken. Budgetary Control was last fully audited in 2019/20 and a satisfactory assurance opinion was issued.	To ensure that budget management is included in all reviews where possible.
23	Do officer reports to council meetings contain financial advice?	All officer reports to the Council, Cabinet or committee meetings contain a section on the financial implications of taking a decision. All draft reports are subject to consultation with Senior Management Team, legal and finance officers before publication.	

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
24	How are the council's accounts approved?	The council prepares a set of financial statements each year, which are submitted to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee for approval. The draft accounts for 2021/22 have to be prepared by 31 July 2022, and the final accounts have to be audited, approved by the Joint Audit and Governance Committee and published by 30 November 2022.	To complete the 2021-22 statement of accounts during 2022-23 and prepare the statement of accounts for 2022-23.
25	Are the accounts audited?	The council's financial statements are audited by its external auditor, EY. Each year's accounts and EY's annual Audit Letter are available to the public and are published on the council's website. The audited accounts and the external auditor's report are considered by the Joint Audit and Governance Committee. The audited 2020/21 statement of accounts are available on our website Audit letter Sept 2021	
26	How does the council ensure it follows the correct accountancy practices?	Officers keep up to date with the latest accounting developments, which enable them to be prepared for the changes in accounting practice that affect the preparation and presentation of the financial statements. The council subscribes to the Chartered Institute of Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Finance Advisory Network and officers regularly attend these network events, enabling them to prepare for changes to accounting requirements.	

The risk management framework

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
27	How does the council assess risks to ensure services are not disrupted?	Risk management is important to the successful delivery of the council's objectives. It identifies and assesses risks, decides on appropriate responses, and provides assurance that the chosen responses are effective. The overall responsibility for effective risk management in the council lies with the Chief Executive, supported by the Senior Management Team. The council uses a standard risk management methodology which encompasses the identification, analysis, prioritisation, management and monitoring of risks in a corporate risk register.	To conduct a review of the risk management strategy and supporting framework beyond 2022.

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
		Councillors are made aware of how these risks are being managed through reports to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee. The council employs a risk and insurance officer to implement the risk management strategy. A new joint risk management strategy and joint risk management policy and guidance was published in July 2020 and will be reviewed again in 2022 to incorporate references to corporate delivery framework and revised roles and responsibility updates.	
28	How does management monitor risks?	Risk champions have been identified for each service area, and operational risk registers are in place for these and all heads of service are responsible for ensuring that risks are identified and prioritised and entered onto the risk register. A monthly meeting reviews the operational risk registers and 'horizon scans' future risks. The risk reporting framework in place is as follows: • Monthly reporting from project groups, service areas, third party contractors and corporate risks to the Risk Forum. • Quarterly reporting to the programmes and assurance team. • Quarterly reporting as and when required to Cabinet, Strategic Management Team, and the Operational Management Group. • Half yearly reporting to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee. All line managers are responsible for implementing strategies at team level through adequate communication, training and the assessment and monitoring of risks. All officers must consider risk as part of everyday activities and provide input to the risk management process.	Line managers to ensure risk is considered as part of all officer activities

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
29	Does the council have any business continuity arrangements?	The council has business continuity management arrangements in place to ensure continuation of priority services in the event of an unforeseen disruption. For example, these arrangements were put into practice on 13 March 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, instructing everyone to work from home where they could. The council had implemented this a week prior to the government's lockdown. The office has remained Covid-19 secure with strong measures in place. Formal meetings were held virtually to allow decision-making to continue. Some staff were diverted to business-critical work, to support the local community (examples: a helpline and food deliveries), local business Covid-19 grant administration and support, assisting the NHS testing and vaccine roll out and county-wide efforts during the pandemic. This effort has continued through 2021-2022, with additional pressures on resources with officers helping with local work regarding ongoing effects of the pandemic, Homes for Ukraine, and work related to supporting households with the energy crisis / energy rebate administration, whilst maintaining our standard services. Formal council meetings are continuing in a hybrid format to increase accessibility, which has increased since the pandemic due to remote viewing. Considering the temporary legislation to hold virtual council meetings was removed, formal decision making occurs in person with a live stream onto Youtube.	To ensure business continuity arrangements continue to be regularly reviewed. Review of the Business continuity strategy.
30	Do officer reports to council meetings advise on risk?	Risk management has been incorporated into officer reports to Council, Cabinet and committee meetings, where officers are required to detail the risks and implications that the council faces in making its decision.	Report writing training / refresh on requirements

The management development framework

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
31	How does the council help new councillors in their roles?	Councillors are offered a comprehensive induction programme after their election. This includes a welcome event, a councillor's guide, a briefing on essential issues affecting the council, and targeted training sessions	To continue to implement the councillors' induction

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
		on planning and licensing law, and effective scrutiny. There will be a further assessment of ongoing training needs. Members of the Joint Audit and Governance Committee also had a training programme. A Councillors induction programme will be implemented after the elections in 2023 and preparations are underway to prepare for this. Councillors are allocated a buddy – an experienced officer who can answer questions or signpost new members to the right place.	programme and to induct any councillors elected at a by-election. Review and planning of induction programme and updates to the councillor induction handbook and accessibility of information given priority.
32	Does the council have an audit committee?	The council has a Joint Audit and Governance Committee (JAGC) with South Oxfordshire District Council. The purpose of the joint committee is to ensure a consistent approach, avoid duplication of resources and improve joint working between both councils. The Joint Audit and Governance Committee undertakes the core functions of an audit committee, as set out in CIPFA's Audit Committees – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities (2005). There is a 2018 update to this guidance, which officers will review in 2022/23 and consider any necessary changes that can be made to the operation of the JAGC. The committee has a work programme to keep track of workstreams for the year ahead. Each council continues to have an individual audit and governance sub-committee to agree procedures for handling individual code of conduct complaints against district, town and parish councillors.	To continue to ensure that the Joint Audit and Governance Committee membership is trained appropriately. Review of committee's operation as per CIPFA guidance update.
33	Does the council have a scrutiny function?	The council has a Joint Scrutiny Committee with South Oxfordshire District Council to consider matters affecting both councils, and a separate Scrutiny Committee to consider its own matters. The scrutiny committees continue to help develop council policy. They also review performance in meeting council objectives, and the council's own	To continue to ensure that the Joint Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Committee members

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
		Scrutiny Committee holds Cabinet to account for its decisions. The scrutiny committees can set up task and finish groups to continue the work of scrutiny between meetings by investigating issues and suggest improvements. Scrutiny training was completed following the May 2019 elections and scrutiny briefing sessions were held. Scrutiny meetings Joint scrutiny meetings	are trained appropriately.
34	Does the council have a management training programme?	The development opportunities for senior officers includes support towards a nationally recognised qualification. They can also attend other strategic leadership programmes. Attendees evaluate these programmes, provide feedback and line managers review training as part of the development and performance review and the formal one to one process. Where identified executive coaching and mentoring is made available to senior managers.	To continue the management development training programme in 2022/23 to consolidate management development through refresher and follow-up sessions.

Internal Audit

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
35	How does the council audit its functions?	Internal Audit is the council's independent assurance function that provides an objective assessment on the effectiveness of the council's services. It assists the council by evaluating the adequacy of governance, risk management, internal controls and use of resources through its planned audit work and recommends improvements where necessary. It may also undertake consulting services at the request of the councils, subject to there being no impact on the core assurance work and the availability of skills and resources.	Continuation of the internal audit programme for 2022-23

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
		Significant weaknesses identified in governance, risk management and internal controls will be communicated to the appropriate level of management through an audit report, and advice issued on how particular problems may be resolved and control strengthened to minimise the level of risk to an acceptable level. SMT has a standing agenda item to deal with any limited assurance reports at the earliest possible opportunity.

Internal Audit provides assurance that it has complied with the relevant Internal Audit Standard setters. These include the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, which came into effect on 1 April 2013. From 1 April 2017 these standards encompassed the mandatory elements of the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors' International Professional Practices Framework. | |
| 36 | Does the council pro-actively combat fraud? | The primary responsibility for the prevention and detection of fraud lies with management, who are also responsible for managing the risk of fraud, bribery and corruption. The internal audit team are responsible for remaining alert to the possibility of fraud, including intentional wrongdoing, errors and omissions, poor value for money, failure to comply with management policy and conflicts of interest when performing their individual audits. Auditors are responsible for having sufficient knowledge to identify indicators that fraud or corruption may have been committed. The risk of fraud is formally considered in every audit and where necessary, the effectiveness of controls to prevent/detect fraud are tested.

The profile of the anti-fraud, bribery and corruption policy and the joint whistleblowing policy have been raised by increased visibility, resulting from inclusion on the council's website.

The council actively participates in the national anti-fraud initiative, publicises successful cases against fraud, and shares intelligence with relevant partner organisations such as the Police, the Department for | Continue to remain alert to the possibility of fraud when performing individual audits. |

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
		Work and Pensions, and the National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN). The council prosecutes those committed of fraud. It undertakes active recovery of fraudulent overpayments and ensures policies are applied consistently. The internal control arrangements include the council's Constitution, the provision of an internal audit service, reports to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee when necessary, transparent governance reporting through an assurance framework, and compliance with relevant laws and regulations. The council has an anti-money laundering policy and procedure and has designated the Section 151 Officer to be the council's anti-money laundering reporting officer. Anti-fraud and corruption response plan While the risk of money laundering to the council remains low, the council remains vigilant. The council has in place an anti-fraud, bribery and corruption policy and a whistleblowing policy; these were reviewed and updated in 2019.	

External sources of assurance

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
37	How does the council respond to issues raised by its external auditor?	Issues raised by the council's external auditor, and other external inspectors are used to identify improvement areas in the council's governance arrangements. EY was appointed as the council's external auditor by the Public Sector Audit Appointments to continue to act as external auditors to Vale of White Horse District Council from 2018/19. During 2021/22 the council opted into the Public Sector Audit Appointments framework for the audits from 2023/24 onwards.	

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
		Any issues raised by the council's external auditor are reported to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee. The committee reviews the actions of the Senior Management Team to ensure that issues have been addressed . The committee considered the external auditor's annual audit letter 2019/20 in November 2021. The Local Government Ombudsman provides a summary of information on complaints about the council to enable it to incorporate any feedback into service improvement. These are reported to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee annually. The Senior Management Team has used the ombudsman's feedback to review service provision.	

Current governance issues

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions
38	How does the council monitor its contract under the Five Councils Partnership?	The council has a contract for some of its corporate services with a contractor, through the Five Councils Partnership with Hart District Council, Havant Borough Council, Mendip District Council, and South Oxfordshire District Council. The council entered into an inter-authority agreement with the other partner councils to cover the procurement and the governance of the future partnership. In addition, a joint client team and a joint committee oversee the delivery of the contract. The Joint Scrutiny Committee with South Oxfordshire District Council undertakes the scrutiny role. The contract is also monitored by a joint committee of members from all of the participating councils; by officers representing the councils on a Joint Tactical Board, and by chief executives on a Senior Management Board.	To keep the corporate services contract under review in 2022/23, taking any opportunities for commercial or operational improvement.
39	Does the council monitor the effectiveness of individual projects?	Following a series of programme governance reviews in 2018/19, the council reviewed and updated its project management framework.	To continue to monitor the effectiveness of projects in 2022/23.

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2021/22	Actions

Conclusion

14. The council proposes over the coming year to take steps to address the actions above. These will further enhance governance arrangements. We, the undersigned, 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.

Signature		Date	
	Mark Stone, Chief Executive		20 October 2023
Signature		Date	
	Councillor Bethia Thomas, Leader of the Council		20 October 2023