

Committee: **Governance and Audit Committee**
 Date of meeting: **27 July 2021**
 Report Subject: **Annual Governance Statement 2020/21**
 Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Nigel Daniels, Leader / Executive Member Corporate Services**
 Report Submitted by: **Rhian Hayden – Chief Officer Resources**
 Report Written by: **Louise Rosser – Audit and Risk Manager**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance & Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	Virtual		27.07.21					

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 To present to the Governance & Audit Committee the Draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2020/21 (attached at Appendix A).
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 The report provides the Draft AGS for 2020/21, providing an assessment of the effectiveness of the Authority’s governance arrangements.
 - 2.2 Responsibility for reviewing the Annual Governance Statement has been delegated to the Governance & Audit Committee as ‘those charged with Governance’. However, as is appropriate, the statement has been reviewed by the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) in line with the principles of good governance, confirming that it reflects their understanding of the governance arrangements in place for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council during the 2020/21 financial year.
 - 2.3 The statement is collated following an evidence gathering exercise which calls upon a number of sources including:
 - Internal and External Regulatory Reports
 - Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Manager
 - An Evidence Framework illustrating how the Authority complies with the core principles of the Code of Governance.
 - 2.4 As a consequence of Covid, some of the ways the Council operates have had to change during 2020/21, such as a move to agile working, however, these changes have not weakened the governance framework.
 - 2.5 The AGS has been produced to reflect these changes, with notable updates being to the engagement activities conducted for the period under Core Principle B, development of wellbeing objectives under Core Principle B, expansion of self-assessment requirements under Core Principle D and changes to the Governance and Audit Committee under Core Principle G.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The Governance & Audit Committee consider the following options:

Option 1

The Committee approve and adopt the Draft AGS having considered and challenged the content, ensuring it is consistent with their knowledge and understanding of the wider issues affecting the Council.

Option 2

The Committee propose amendments / alterations to the Draft AGS, having considered and challenged the content, and deeming it to be consistent with their knowledge and understanding of the wider issues affecting the Council, subject to the proposed amendments.

Option 3

The Committee choose not to approve the Draft AGS having considered and challenged the content, deeming it not to be consistent with their knowledge and understanding of the wider issues affecting the Council.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 Production of an AGS assists the Authority in achieving its Corporate Plan Priority of an ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services we know matter to our communities by providing an assessment of the governance arrangements in place for Blaenau Gwent CBC.

4.2 Production of the AGS is a statutory requirement under the Accounts and Audit Regulations (Wales) 2014 to accompany the Statement of Accounts.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)

There are no direct financial implications arising from the production of the AGS.

5.2 Risk including Mitigating Actions

Options 1 and 2 are compliant with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations (Wales) 2014. Option 3 would result in non-compliance with these regulations and could affect the opinion of the external auditor. on the Statement of Accounts and require additional regulatory work to be undertaken.

5.3 Legal

There are no direct legal implications arising from the production of the AGS. If option 3 is selected, we would not comply with legislation.

5.4 Human Resources

The production of the AGS involves the investment of Senior Management time from across the Authority. The commitment is met from existing resources.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 Performance Information and Data

6.1.1 The production of the AGS is an element of the governance framework of the Authority.

6.1.2 Due to the pressures resulting from the covid 19 pandemic it was not possible to produce the AGS in line with the timescales required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations (Wales). However, the AGS has been produced within the timeframes specified in the statutory notice issued by the Authority in relation to the production of the Draft Statement of Accounts.

6.2 Expected outcome for the public

The AGS sets out how the Council's governance framework has operated for the ultimate benefit of the citizens of Blaenau Gwent.

6.3 Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)

The AGS informs the reader of the Authority's consultation and engagement activities during 2020/21. Officers from all directorates have contributed to the production of the AGS and Members consider & confirm that the AGS reflects their understanding of the Council's position for the previous year.

6.4 Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)

The statement provides a comparison of the governance activity for 2020/21 with the Code of Governance and identifies development activities for 2021/22 and future years.

6.5 Preventative focus

The AGS outlines how the Authority's governance arrangements have operated in the context of risk management and internal control, identifying weaknesses and developments for the future.

6.6 Collaboration / partnership working

The AGS acknowledges the Authority's collaborative working approach as part of the Blaenau Gwent Public Service Board and other partners.

6.7 Integration (across service areas)

Officers from all directorates have contributed to the production of the AGS and the document reflects a whole Authority perspective.

6.8 EgIA(screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)

The production of the AGS has a neutral impact against people or groups from the nine protected characteristics.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The AGS provides the assessment of the Authority's governance framework against the Code of Governance. Recommendations for development are made in the statement and will be actioned throughout

2021/22. Progress against these recommendations will be reported via the 2021/22 AGS.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix A – Annual Governance Statement
- Code of Governance