



Open Report on behalf of Andrew Crookham, Executive Director - Resources

Report to:	Audit Committee
Date:	6 February 2023
Subject:	Combined Assurance Report

Summary:

The purpose of this report is to:

Provide the Audit Committee with insight on the assurances across all the Council's critical services, key risks, partnerships and projects.

The Chief Executive, Executive Directors and the Chief Fire Officer will be present to respond to any questions the Committee may have on the assurance framework.

Recommendation(s):

That the Committee review the Combined Assurance Status Report 2022/23 seeking assurance over the adequacy of the Council's governance, risk, and control environment; and makes recommendations on any further scrutiny requirements or actions.

Background

1. The Council has produced its annual Combined Assurance Status Report with each Executive Director assessing information across:
 - critical service delivery activities
 - key risks
 - key projects
 - key partnerships, providing an overall assurance level.
2. Internal Audit have co-ordinated the overall assurance information to help ensure that it 'stacks up' and applied some constructive challenge on the assurance opinions being given **but** as accountability rests with management, it is the senior management's views that has determined the overall assurance status. This is in line with a control environment that promotes a culture where we:-
 - take what we have been told on trust – giving a realistic and honest assessment,

being open and transparent

- encourage accountability with those responsible for managing the service and associated risks
- provide some independent challenge / oversight where it matters most.

Overall Assurance Level 2022/23

3. Overall, there continues to be a good level of positive assurances in place, with **reduced Red** Assurance. There has been a **slight increase** in **Amber** assurance and **slight reduction in Green** assurance - as shown below: -

Overall assurance rating	Changes since 2021/22	
Red Assurance	?	Down from 3% to 1%
Amber Assurance	?	Up from 38% to 42%
Green Assurance	?	Down from 59% to 57%

There are improved assurance ratings in Transformation Programme, Children's Services, Place and Fire & Rescue - with static or reducing Red assurances.

Assurance ratings for Corporate and Adult Care & Community Wellbeing have mostly remained static.

Resources shows a slightly reduced assurance level in comparison with 2021/22 however, this now comprises of both the previous Resources and Commercial directorates.

4. There are two areas with lower levels of assurance shown on critical activities - these relate to:

Directorates	High critical activities
Adult Care & Community Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hospitals
Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regeneration Funding

Management action and / or appropriate governance oversight processes are in place to monitor improvement actions.

Conclusion

1. The report confirms that all key areas and risks have been subject to assurance procedures. Overall, there continues to be a good level of assurance, with reduced areas of low assurance compared to 2021/22.
2. There are 'no surprises' and the assurance framework remains strong demonstrating appropriate management oversight and monitoring.
3. The combined assurance report provides the Committee with a good level of understanding about the level of assurances in place – supporting its 'watchdog' role and remit. In reviewing the Combined Assurance Status Report the Committee may wish to consider:
 - whether the assurances given are reliable and adequately evidenced
 - seeking direct assurance from the Corporate Leadership Team on how they consider the results of the assurances given
 - if any specific issue / risk should be referred to the Governance Group for consideration in the Council's annual governance statement
 - whether the reports 'realistically' reflect the Audit Committee's knowledge and understanding of the Council's governance, risk and assurance arrangements.
4. The information obtained from the combined assurance model will:
 - Inform the Internal Annual Audit Plan 2023/24 by identifying where more independent assurance is required based on significance and risk.
 - Help inform the Head of Audit annual audit opinion 2022/23.
 - Help inform the development of the Council's Annual Governance Statement

Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

None

Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Internal Audit Combined Assurance Status Report 2022/23 –February 2023

Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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