

## **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT**

### **Purpose of this Statement**

The purpose of the Annual Governance Statement is to assess and demonstrate that there is a sound system of corporate governance throughout the organisation.

### **Scope of responsibility**

Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards covering local authority activities, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are carried out, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is 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.

The Council has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance which has been developed in consideration of the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government. A copy of the authority's code is on our website or can be obtained from the Finance team. This statement explains how the Council has complied with the code and also meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an annual governance statement.

### **The purpose of the governance framework**

The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values by which the authority is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads its communities. It enables the authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate services and value for money.

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

The governance framework has been in place at Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2016 and up to the date of approval of this statement.

### **The governance framework**

The Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance sets out the arrangements in place to govern the Council's activities in five key areas.

#### Community Focus

The Council's vision is to provide excellent public services, good value for money and effective community leadership. This vision is set out and communicated to the residents of the Borough, the Council's partners and Members and Officers in the Council's Corporate Performance Plan 2012/15. The plan spans a three year period and details the Council's Key Priorities and action it will take alongside its partners to deliver the vision.

The Council is facing a considerable period of change and challenge and in response is in the process of developing a new Corporate Strategy. The Strategy will set out the actions we now need to take to maintain and improve the services which are most important to the local community, the Council's priorities, whilst taking into account a much reduced level of funding.

The Council has established arrangements to communicate and consult with Members of the public on the Council's work and key policy changes and this consultation allows the development of strategic priorities and the Corporate Performance Plan.

#### Service Delivery Arrangements

Delivering excellent quality services while providing good value for money is fundamental to the Council's vision and this is demonstrated in the focus within the Corporate Performance Plan on redesigning services and further improving efficiency across all services. The delivery of the

Corporate Performance Plan is supported by detailed operational plans prepared by individual services, which in turn are fed down to team and individual objectives through performance management arrangements.

Performance of the Council and its partners in achieving its objectives is monitored and measured by services and their respective Service Management Teams and subsequently Members. Individual services are accountable to the Corporate Management Team for operational performance monitoring and measurement and are responsible for taking action to correct any adverse performance, in the first instance, as appropriate.

The decision-making framework of the Council is set out in the Constitution including statutory functions and the scheme of delegation of responsibilities. The Constitution is kept under review by the Monitoring Officer and Management Team with any proposed changes presented to the Council for adoption. The Cabinet are responsible for taking most operational decisions. Notices of Key Decisions are published in advance via a monthly bulletin on the Council's website. All Member meetings held by the Council are open to the public, unless the items being discussed are considered to be private under the Local Government Act 1972; these will include staffing and legal matters and those of a contractual nature.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for reviewing and scrutinising the decisions made by and performance of the Cabinet and/or Committees and Council Officers. Decisions made by Cabinet, Committee or a Cabinet Member at an Advisory Board can be subjected to scrutiny via a call-in procedure allowing challenge within five working days of the decision being taken.

The Council's financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010).

#### Structures & Processes

The Council's Constitution details the roles and responsibilities that are delegated to Members and Officers and specifies which decisions may be made by individuals and which are reserved for either Committee, Cabinet or Council. The Constitution includes the Council's Financial and Contracts Procedure Rules setting out the Council's standing orders and financial regulations. The specific roles and responsibilities of Officers are set out through the scheme of delegation including the specific responsibilities of the Chief Executive (as Head of Paid Service), the Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer ensuring effective arrangements are in place for the discharge of these functions.

Effective communication between Officers and Members is ensured through the Protocol on Member/Officer Relations documented within the Constitution. Arrangements are in place ensuring both Members and Officers declare any interests that may impact on the Council's decision making process. Such interests are recorded on a register which is maintained and monitored by the Monitoring Officer and is available on the Council's website.

#### Risk Management & Internal Control

The core functions of an audit committee as defined by *CIPFA's Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities* is fulfilled by the Council's Audit Committee. The Council's Constitution sets out the responsibility of the Audit Committee to provide independent assurance of the adequacy of the risk management framework and associated control environment. To do so, the Audit Committee has adopted a Risk Management Strategy that sets out the roles of Officers and Members in the identification and minimisation of risk.

Risk management practices are embedded within the organisation through the annual service and strategic planning processes, which is used to develop the Council's vision and objectives. This ensures that risks to the achievement of the Council's objectives are identified and managed appropriately. Risks identified are scored on the basis of their likelihood and impact and existing controls and required actions to further mitigate risks are captured in risk registers. The framework sets out the responsibility of Officers leading on areas with partnership arrangements to ensure that the partner has an adequate risk management strategy and sufficient insurance cover to protect the interests of the Council.

The Council's standard report template requires Officers and Members to carry out a risk assessment of the action recommended in the report ensuring risk is considered in all decision-making of the authority. This assessment also covers legal, financial and value for money considerations and equality issues where relevant.

The Council has an effective Internal Audit function which operates in line with proper practices; for 2015/16 this is governed by the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the CIPFA application note to the Standards. The Review of Effectiveness of the System of Internal Audit for the year

2015/16 concluded that a good system of internal audit is in place within the Council. The Chief Audit Executive role meets the requirements as set out in the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Public Service Organisations. The Audit Committee are responsible for the Council's anti-fraud and corruption arrangements including whistle-blowing. The Chief Audit Executive is responsible for the maintenance of the Council's Anti-Fraud & Corruption Policy and Confidential Reporting Policy (Whistleblowing) and has arrangements and resources in place to investigate any allegations made under either document.

#### Standards of Conduct

Standards of conduct among Officers and Members are governed through the Council's Officer Code of Conduct and Members' Code of Conduct.

The Members' Code of Conduct is based around ethical behaviour and requires objective and impartial decision making. The Code is communicated to all new Members on induction. Upholding standards of Member conduct is the responsibility of the Joint Standards Committee. The Committee are also responsible for ensuring Members receive suitable induction and ongoing training and support.

All staff are required to read and understand the Officer Code of Conduct available through the Council's intranet and are bound by it as detailed in employee contracts. The Council has an appraisal scheme in place for all staff that seeks to ensure staff achieve agreed levels of performance and the monitoring and management of performance is the responsibility of line managers. In addition the Council's statutory Officers are subject to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) through their respective Professional Organisations.

The Council's duty to ensure that all activities undertaken are in accordance with the law is discharged in part by the Council's Constitution including its Financial Procedure Rules and Contracts Procedure Rules and supported by strategies/policies relevant to Council activities that are made available to staff and the public via the Council's intranet and internet sites respectively. All strategies/policies are allocated to a lead Officer who is responsible for their periodic review and updating.

#### **Review of effectiveness**

Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the managers within the authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Head of Internal Audit's Annual Report, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

The effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements has been evaluated through a self assessment against the detailed principles and arrangements suggested in CIPFA's *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government, Guidance Note for English Authorities*, 2012 Edition.

It should be noted that no significant governance issues were identified in the Annual Governance Review and no other areas were identified for further enhancement.

Signed

Signed

J. E. Beilby Bsc (Hons) MBA  
Chief Executive

Councillor N. J. Heslop  
Leader of the Council

Dated

Dated