

**BRENTWOOD BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

**ANNUAL GOVERNANCE
STATEMENT**

2022/23

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1. Scope of Responsibility

Brentwood Borough Council (the Council) is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted lawfully, that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for. The Council has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to continuously improve its functions, having regard to best practice, economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

In discharging this duty, the Council acknowledges its responsibility for appropriately governing its affairs, the effective exercise of its functions and the management of its risks. The Council has adopted a Code of Corporate Governance (the Code) which defines the principles and practices that underpin our governance arrangements.

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) produced the “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government framework (2016)”. This emphasises sustainability and the need to focus on the economic, social and environmental impacts that actions may have on future generations.

The Code is reviewed annually and is consistent with the seven core principles of the CIPFA-SOLACE framework. The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) has been prepared in accordance with the CIPFA-SOLACE framework. For the year ended 31 March 2023, the AGS shows our compliance to the Code and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, regulation 6(1).

The AGS describes how the effectiveness of the governance arrangements has been monitored and evaluated during 2022-23 and any changes planned for 2023-24.

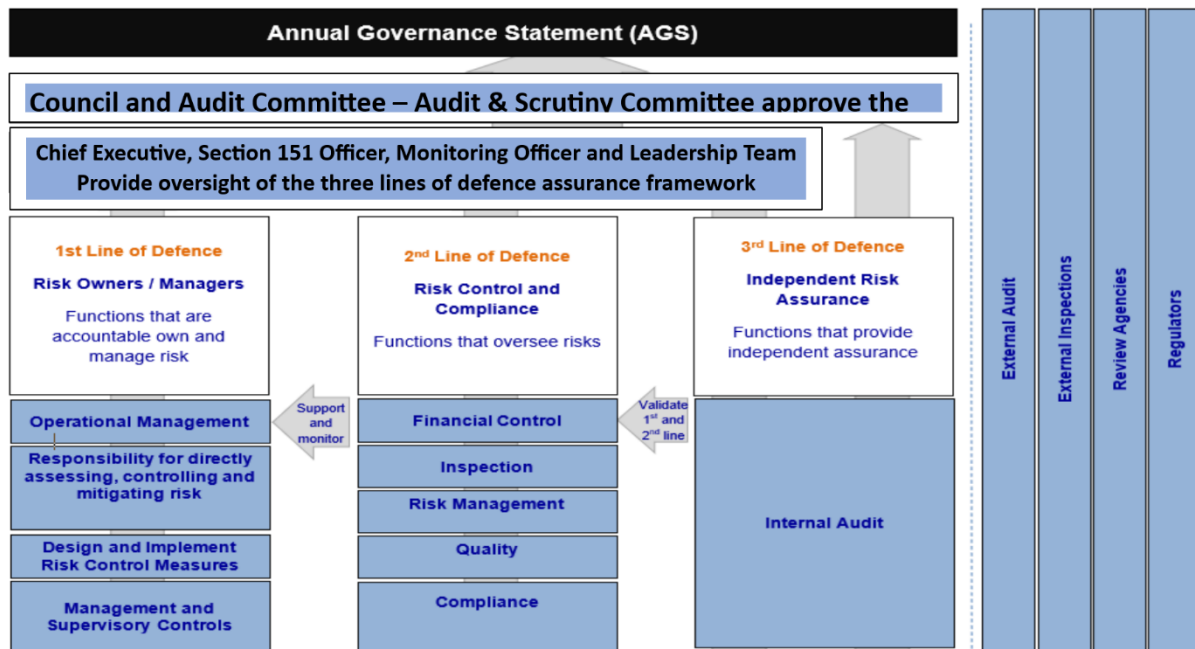
The Council’s Statutory Officers are as follows:

- Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service);
- the Director of Resources (Section 151 or S151 Officer);
- and the Monitoring Officer (the MO).

They direct the annual reviews of the effectiveness of the Council’s governance arrangements against the Code, providing oversight and robust challenge. When completed, the findings are reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, which identifies and monitors any improvement actions.

2. The Corporate Governance Framework

Corporate governance refers to how the Council is led, controlled and held to account. The diagram below shows the Council's Governance, Risk and Control Framework:



The Council's governance framework aims to ensure that in conducting its business it:

- Operates in a lawful, open, inclusive and honest manner;
- Ensures that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively;
- Has effective arrangements for the management of risk; and
- Secures continuous improvement in the way that it operates.

The governance framework comprises the culture, values, systems and processes by which the Council is managed. It enables the Council to monitor its objectives and consider whether these have led to the delivery of effective services and value for money. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its objectives.

The framework brings together legislative requirements, best practice principles and management processes. The system of internal control is a significant part of the framework and is designed to manage the Council's risks to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve corporate objectives and can, therefore, only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance. The system of internal control, reinforces the governance framework and helps the Council to:

- Operate in a lawful, transparent, inclusive and honest manner;
- Ensure that public money and assets are safeguarded from misuse, loss or fraud, are accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively;
- Have effective arrangements for the management of risk;

- Secure continuous improvement in the way that it operates;
- Enable human, financial, environmental and other resources to be managed efficiently and effectively;
- Properly maintain records and information; and
- Ensure the Council's values and ethical standards are met.

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 (2016).

The Code recognises that effective governance is achieved through the following seven CIPFA-SOLACE principles:

- Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law;
- Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement;
- Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits;
- Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of intended outcomes;
- Developing the Council's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it;
- Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management; and
- Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit, to deliver effective accountability.

3. Review of Effectiveness

The governance framework includes arrangements for:

- Identifying and communicating the authority's vision of its purpose and intended outcomes for citizens and service users;
- Reviewing the authority's vision and its implications for the authority's governance arrangements;
- Measuring the quality of services for users, ensuring that they are delivered in accordance with the authority's objectives and ensuring that they represent the best use of resources;
- Defining and documenting the roles and responsibilities of Committees, with clear delegation arrangements and protocols for effective communication and performance management;
- Developing, communicating and embedding codes of conduct, defining the standards of behaviour for members and staff;
- Reviewing and updating Financial Rules, Contract Rules, Constitution, Scheme of Delegation and supporting procedure notes / manuals, which clearly define how decisions are taken and the processes and controls required to manage risks;
- Ensuring effective counter fraud and anti-corruption arrangements are developed and maintained;
- Ensuring the authority's financial management arrangements meet the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2015);
- Undertaking the core functions of an Audit Committee, as identified in CIPFA's Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities;
- Ensuring compliance with relevant laws and regulations, internal policies and procedures, and that expenditure is lawful;
- Whistleblowing referrals and for receiving and investigating complaints from the public;
- Identifying the development needs of members and senior officers in relation to their strategic roles, supported by the appropriate training;
- Establishing clear channels of communication with all sections of the community and other stakeholders, ensuring accountability and encouraging open consultation; and
- Incorporating good governance arrangements in respect of partnerships, including shared services and other joint working and reflecting these in the authority's overall governance arrangements.

The Council's governance framework has operated effectively throughout 2022-23 and up to the date of approval of the annual statement of accounts and the AGS.

The governance framework is consistent with the principles set out in the CIPFA-SOLACE Framework, and is reviewed on an annual basis. The table below is a summary of the Council's compliance to the CIPFA-SOLACE Framework:

PRINCIPLE A

Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

Arrangements in place:

- Member and officer codes of conduct
- Confidential Reporting arrangements
- Counter Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Strategy
- Fraud Response Plan
- Financial Regulations and underpinning financial procedures in place
- Contract Standing Orders
- Declaration of interests procedure
- Register of interests (Members and Senior Officers)
- Register of gifts and hospitality
- Customer feedback and complaints procedure with oversight by Management Team
- Equalities & Diversity Policy and procedures
- Equality impact assessments are undertaken
- Climate Change / Environmental impact assessment are undertaken
- Information governance policy and framework supported by security policies in place
- There is a designated senior information risk owner in post (SIRO)
- Recruitment/ selection procedures aligned with corporate ethos and values
- Customer Care training is mandatory for all front line staff
- The Council participates in the National Fraud Initiative
- Staff required to confirm that they have read and understood the Council's anti-fraud, bribery and corruption arrangements.
- Internal audit plan coverage includes governance and ethics related audits, in line with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.
- Any planning applications submitted by staff are reviewed in public
- Agenda management sheets of Council reports include a requirement to highlight the legal implications of decisions
- Records of regulatory training required and undertaken are retained on the Council's HR system
- The Council has an independent persons panel in place which is available for consultation regarding any conduct related complaints.
- The Council has implemented arrangements to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2018.
- Shareholders Committee are place to oversee the activity of the trading companies.
- Team meetings and 121s provide an additional opportunity for officers to raise any concerns they may have

Conclusion:

The Council was compliant with Principle A of the CIPFA-SOLACE Framework during 2022/23 and this compliance has been maintained to the date this statement was signed.

PRINCIPLE B

Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Arrangements in place:

- The Council publishes on its website a range of information including meeting agendas and reports, financial and procurement data, invitations to tender, senior officer salaries, the contracts register, annual governance statement and financial statements, corporate performance information, planning applications and decisions, delegated decisions and section 106 agreements.
- Records are retained detailing any decisions taken by officers using their delegated authority, including the rationale. Such decisions are also published.
- The strategic risk register is scrutinised by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.
- The Council consults widely and comprehensively with stakeholders on its proposals. Wider engagement takes place via the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA) and the Local Enterprise Partnership.
- There is a Scrutiny Committee work programme in place, with members of the public invited to recommend topics and attend annual work planning meetings.
- A Forward Plan is in place setting out what consultation will be undertaken in advance of decisions being made, and with whom.
- A register of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion activities is in place and kept up to date. Equality & diversity training is mandatory for all staff.
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy Statement and Objectives reviewed by the Equality & Diversity Steering Group, and amended to ensure alignment with the Corporate Strategy
- A communications strategy is in place.
- Customer feedback procedures are in place.
- Active engagement with employees takes place in several ways including through a bi-annual survey, regular employee briefings, the employee network, team meetings and through the Joint Union Consultation Forum.
- Employment policies are developed in consultation with staff and trade unions.
- Cross party working groups are operated as an additional measure which ensures engagement with a broad range of stakeholders on key Council decisions.
- Council meetings are live streamed and recordings are retained on the Council's website
- The Corporate Strategy 2020-25 is supported by Service Plans

Conclusion:

The Council was compliant with Principle B of the CIPFA-SOLACE Framework during 2022/23 and this compliance has been maintained to the date this statement was signed.

PRINCIPLE C

Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefit

Arrangements in place:

- A Corporate Strategy is in place covering the period 2020-2025. The Plan and future strategy documents will provide clear direction to members, staff and other stakeholders. It will also inform the better use of Council resources to deliver priorities. It has not been developed in isolation and has taken account of national, regional, county-wide and local priorities.
- The Medium Term Financial Plan is regularly reviewed and updated.
- Cabinet and Committee reports set out the potential impacts of changes on stakeholders.
- Strategic and operational risk registers are in place.
- The Council has declared a climate emergency and has committed to address its impact on the climate.
- The Council consults widely on its proposals considering the economic, social, and environmental impacts of plans, policies, and decisions.
- There is a clear vision for Brentwood through the Corporate Strategy 2020-25 and other underpinning policy and strategy documents available on the Council's website.
- All planning and development decisions are considered openly and transparently in terms of their economic, social, and environmental benefits and impacts.
- The Council is targeting Carbon neutral by 2040, the key documents to support this is the Environmental Strategy 2023 - 2026.

Conclusion:

The Council was compliant with Principle C of the CIPFA-SOLACE Framework during 2022/23 and this compliance has been maintained to the date this statement was signed.

PRINCIPLE D

Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of intended outcomes

Arrangements in place:

- The Council manages performance through published national and local management performance indicators; this enables intervention to be targeted where it is needed.
- The Business Plan and service plans are designed to ensure that the Council targets the actions necessary to deliver the Corporate Strategy.
- Strategic risk registers are in place linked to strategic and operational targets, detailing the controls in place and the interventions planned to ensure delivery of objectives.
- Each service area is led by a Director, and dedicated member portfolio holders are aligned with these service areas.
- Committee and Cabinet reports set out the risks and options associated with decisions.
- Quarterly finance and performance reports are submitted to and reviewed by Cabinet.
- An annual budget report and precept setting report, is submitted to Council for approval and there is an established budget setting and monitoring process, which the Council looks to improve year on year, with greater focus on ownership and accountability.
- The Medium-Term Financial Plan is regularly reviewed and updated.
- Approved Asset Management Strategy in place.
- The Council is targeting Carbon neutral by 2040, the key documents to support this is the Environmental Strategy 2023 - 2026.
- The Council consults widely on its proposals considering the economic, social, and environmental impacts of plans, policies, and decisions.
- There is a Forward Plan of key decisions and scrutiny committee arrangements in place.
- A customer feedback procedure is in place.
- A Programme Board in place to oversee delivery of the Business Plan 2020-2023 . Key corporate projects also have governance boards in place to provide oversight and ensure effective delivery.
- Financial regulations and instructions are in place.
- Quarterly reports on treasury management activities are submitted to the Audit Committee.

Conclusion:

The Council was compliant with Principle D of the CIPFA-SOLACE Framework during 2022/23 and this compliance has been maintained to the date this statement was signed.

PRINCIPLE E

Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

Arrangements in place:

- Each member of the leadership team undertakes professional development appropriate to their role.
- The respective roles of the Chief Executive and Leader are clearly defined.
- The leadership team meets every week and Cabinet meets on a regular basis.
- • Section 151 Officer, Monitoring Officer, and Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO/ CIO – Chief Information Officer) are in post.
- The Constitution sets out roles and responsibilities and the Council's decision-making process. An approved scheme of delegation is in place.
- Contract Standing Orders and associated toolkits are in place and are designed to ensure procurement activity is cost effective and ethical.
- Registers of gifts, hospitality, and conflicts of interest in place.
- Gifts and hospitality policy in place.
- Protocol in place setting out the relationship between and roles of members and officers.
- Member training and development programme in place, including dedicated training for planning and licensing committee members.
- Thorough induction processes are in place for all new employees and members, linked to the corporate ethos and values.
- Job profiles clearly set out the responsibilities of officers throughout the organisation.
- HR and Learning and Development Strategies, and Corporate Learning Group in place.
- System of regular team meetings and one to one meetings between managers and staff.
- Employee health and wellbeing is actively promoted, and confidential employee counselling support is always available. Staff are encouraged to complete wellbeing action plans and discuss them with their line manager.
- A comprehensive suite of training and development courses is offered to all employees.
- The Council has a comprehensive suite of HR policies covering employee capability, disciplinary, recruitment and selection, disciplinary and grievance, and flexible working.
- An established Corporate Apprenticeship Scheme is in place.
- Where projects are required, teams are put in place based upon the skills and experience available.
- The Council develops the capacity of community and voluntary groups to become more self-sufficient.
- The Council participates in the Local Authority Challenge.
- Officers are encouraged to subscribe to their relevant professional bodies. This is paid for and supports Continuing Professional Development of the workforce

Conclusion:

The Council was compliant with Principle E of the CIPFA-SOLACE Framework during 2022/23 and this compliance has been maintained to the date this statement was signed.

PRINCIPLE F

Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

Arrangements in place:

- Risk management strategy in place, which was reviewed and updated during the year.
- Strategic and operational risk registers are in place; the strategic risk register is aligned with the corporate strategy.
- The Leadership Team, Audit Committee, Cabinet, Strategic Risk Management Group, and the Health & Safety Committee, all oversee the risk management arrangements.
- The Health & Safety Committee is chaired by a Strategic Director and demonstrates that senior management is taking a lead in risk management.
- A regular risk assessment of the Council's financial reserves and balances is conducted. Key risks are identified, and potential financial impacts are quantified. Reserves are reviewed annually in the context of the risk assessments.
- The annual General Fund budget and level of Council Tax are set taking into account a Section 25 statement from the Chief Officer Finance & Performance on the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves.
- A Medium-Term Financial Plan is in place, and is fully updated on an annual basis.
- Financial information is published on a regular basis and established and embedded budget setting and monitoring procedures are in place.
- The Council has a 'No PO, no pay' policy in place. •
- Financial regulations and instructions are in place.
- Cabinet and Committee system in place including a scrutiny committee and an Audit & Committee with independent Chair and Vice Chairs.
- Programme Board and project management framework in place.
- Training is provided to all members of Committees to ensure that they are suitably skilled to carry out their role effectively. The training is also offered to other members who may be interested in taking up future roles on these Committees.
- Counter fraud strategy, fraud response plan and confidential reporting code in place.
- The internal audit service provides an independent and objective annual report and opinion.
- Chief Officers have all completed an annual return declaring that the control environment for their area of responsibility has been followed throughout the year and that the governance arrangements set out in this document are correctly stated.
- Service planning and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are developed in line with the Corporate Strategy.
- Performance data is reported quarterly to Cabinet.
- Data sharing protocols are in place where applicable.
- Shareholders Committees in place to oversee the activity of the trading companies.

Conclusion:

The Council was compliant with Principle F of the CIPFA-SOLACE Framework during 2022/23 and this compliance has been maintained to the date this statement was signed.

PRINCIPLE G

Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability

Arrangements in place:

- A range of information is published including an annual report of internal audit, the financial statements, the annual report of the external auditor and this annual governance statement, which contains an action plan demonstrating a commitment to continuous improvement.
- All reports are subject to a robust internal review process to ensure they are presented in an understandable style.
- The performance information set out in the financial statements is prepared in consideration of the presentational approach adopted by other similar authorities. • Performance data is reported to Cabinet and the Leadership Team, and is reviewed by the Scrutiny committee.
- In accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code there is an open data section on the Council's website which includes details of senior officer salaries.
- Details of delegated decisions taken by officers are published on the website.
- Independent scrutiny training has been provided to members, the Democratic Services team and the Leadership Team.
- Implementation of external audit recommendations is monitored by the Chief Finance and Performance Officer.
- Implementation of internal audit recommendations is monitored by the Interim Director, Resources, and reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.
- The Interim Director Resources and Head of Audit are provided with direct unfettered access to the Chief Executive, and Chair and Vice Chairs of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.
- The Council submits itself to external peer reviews including by the Local Government Association and has welcomed an equalities and diversity peer review and challenge.
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) policy in place.
- Invitations to tender are published along with the contracts register.
- The Council prepares and publishes an annual report setting out its achievements over the last year; this is reviewed and discussed by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.
- Senior officers are members of and attend professional peer working groups. This helps to ensure continuous improvement and enables the Council to implement best practice

Conclusion:

The Council was compliant with Principle G of the CIPFA-SOLACE Framework during 2022/23 and this compliance has been maintained to the date this statement was signed.

4. Update on Governance Issues from 2021/22

Set out below are the updates for the Governance issues from the 2021/22 Annual Governance report and the action taken in 2022/23:

	Matters Arising from 2021/22 for 2022/23	Actions in 2022/23
1.	Review and finalise governance arrangements for the partnership in 2022/23. i.e. S113 agreement and working arrangements according to business cases	The aims for the partnership between Rochford District Council and Brentwood Borough Council between 2022-23 include reviewing and finalizing its governance arrangements according to business cases, e.g. the S113 agreement. 2023-24 will see the governance arrangements and business cases being finalized, agreed and signed off by both parties involved.
2.	To review existing and produce new strategies across the Council such as workforce strategy and car parking strategy	The priorities for 2023/24 were reviewed and either signed off as complete, where amended or continued if they had not been completed as yet. The priorities were monitored to ensure they were delivering against their aspirations. The need for effective strategic planning and management of performance against this is identified as an area for further action in 2024/25.
3.	Review and monitor the peer challenge action plan	In November 2021, we were delighted to welcome a team of local government peers to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge. This was an opportunity to evaluate and reflect on if our plans were robust and our ambitions were both stretching and deliverable. The aim of the review would identify areas where we can do things better and/or differently to achieve our aims of serving the residents of Brentwood. In term of recommendations, we, accordingly, commenced an action plan.
4.	To continue to improve the Council's Housing stock compliance works in according with appropriate legislation	Whilst Brentwood Borough Council's Housing department have made great strides within the municipal year, including the completion of a stock condition survey which will set out our programme of works for the next five years, the continual improvement of our housing stock's compliance works in accordance with appropriate legislation is still of the upmost importance. A compliance dashboard is now in place, and presented to both CLT and Housing Committee, and this sets out the works that are needed in this area.
5.	To strengthen the control framework for s106 agreements which includes members oversight	As part of the Council's Planning Improvement Programme, there is a workstream to review the current S106 process and implement a new procedure including processing, monitoring and reporting. This is due to be completed in 2024, with the aim of strengthening the control framework.
6.	Ensure governance arrangements have been addressed with all regeneration activity	We have produced a 'Strategic Housing Development Programme' (SHDP) which aims to produce 200 energy efficient homes on existing housing sites of to meet the needs and circumstances of current and future BBC residents. The next few municipal years will see us delivering this programme. Furthermore, we have also

		<p>purchased the 'Baytree Shopping Centre' with the aim of placemaking and regenerating activity in the high street. Finally, we also have aspirations of relocating and reproducing our depot in order for it to be fit-for-purpose to deliver our street and waste services.</p> <p>Looking more specifically at our regeneration activity for partnership, we are producing quarterly SAIL reports to FAIR (formerly PRED), which include updates on BDP; the Annual SAIL AGM includes an update on the BDP. The BDP has quarterly Board meetings which include representatives of MUSE, SAIL and the NED's; Brentwood Borough Councils' Chief Executive was invited as a Non-Board Member; and reporting was made to Officers through regular BBC/SAIL meetings which included updates on the BDP.</p>
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5. Internal Audit Opinion of Brentwood Borough Council's Governance Arrangements

Head of Internal Audit Opinion

The role of internal audit is to provide an opinion to the Council, through the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, on the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control system to ensure the achievement of the organisation's objectives in the areas reviewed.

The annual report from internal audit provides an overall opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's risk management, control and governance processes, within the scope of work undertaken by our firm as outsourced providers of the internal audit service.

It also summarises the activities of internal audit for the period. The basis for forming my opinion is as follows:

- An assessment of the design and operation of the underpinning Assurance Framework and supporting processes;
- An assessment of the range of individual opinions arising from risk based audit assignments contained within internal audit risk based plans that have been reported throughout the year;
- This assessment has taken account of the relative materiality of these areas and management's progress in respect of addressing control weaknesses; and
- Any reliance that is being placed upon third party assurances.

Opinion

Overall, we are able to provide **moderate assurance** that there is a sound system of internal control, designed to meet the Council's objectives and that controls are being applied consistently.

In forming our view we have taken into account that:

- The Council's draft unaudited Statement of Accounts for 2022/23 indicates an underspend of £121,000 against budget, maintaining the general fund at the same level as the prior year (being £2.874 million) and increasing general fund earmarked reserves by £3.213 million over the year.
- The Council is in a period of change, as it is undergoing a One Team Transformation Programme with Rochford District Council, under a joint corporate leadership team formed during 2022/23.
- We have delivered 11 of the planned 13 reviews for 2022/23, of which 10 final reports have been issued and one report is in draft (the Partnership with Rochford audit). For the 10 final reports, nine related to audits on which we provided an opinion and one was an advisory review which carried no audit opinion.
- Due to a delayed start in the audit programme for the year (which could not be started until we were contractually engaged and the audit plan was approved) and further delays experienced in securing audit start dates, we have agreed with management to defer one audit (Data protection regulations) into 2023/24 and to expand the scope of our financial planning audit in 2023/24.

- We have not included the summary from the Partnership with Rochford audit in this report as the draft report has not yet been agreed with officers. However, this does not impact on our overall opinion for the year.
- We agreed with management to split the scope of our work on the main financial systems this year into two components: Audit of key controls (as reported below and feeding into our overall opinion); and an advisory review to provide an independent assessment of how fit for purpose Brentwood and Rochford's finance systems are. The choice of which system to use is ultimately for each Council to make, using a range of factors including cost, future plans, functionality etc. Our review has provided input into this decision but we have not recommended a system. We have not included the findings from this review in this report.
- In respect of the design of the controls, substantial assurance was provided in one out of nine audits (payroll), moderate assurance opinions were provided in seven areas and limited in one area (sheltered accommodation). These opinions are a deterioration compared with 2021/22, when substantial assurance was provided in seven out of twelve audits, moderate assurance opinions were provided in four areas and there was one limited assurance in an operational area.
- In respect of the operational effectiveness of the controls, moderate assurance opinions were provided in all nine areas. These opinions are a deterioration compared with 2021/22, when an opinion of substantial assurance was provided in four areas and moderate assurance in eight areas.
- Officers specifically requested that we carry out the sheltered accommodation audit, instead of the planned housing management audit, as this was recognised as an area in need of improvement.
- Management has responded positively to reports issued and action plans have been developed to address the recommendations raised, although we have experienced some delays in responses to reports and audit requests.
- We have confirmed that 82% of recommendations due for implementation by the date of reporting had been completed, which is fairly similar to the 83% in the prior year.
- Overall, therefore, we have noted some deterioration in the control environment compared to last year, although not to the extent that is necessary to downgrade our overall opinion. Our annual report and head of internal audit opinion has been prepared based on the audit work undertaken in respect of the financial year ended 31 March 2023.

Our annual report and head of internal audit opinion has been prepared based on the audit work undertaken in respect of the financial year ended 31 March 2023.

6. Governance Areas of focus for 2023/24

The Council, Chief Executive and wider senior Offices are committed to ensure the high standards of governance are maintained and remain embedded across the authority. Governance will also remain an area for further development and the following actions are planned in 2023/24. In each case the issue and planned action links the CIPFA-SOLACE framework principle:

<u>PRINCIPLE A</u> Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law
Issue Identified: 1. Review the corporate values in light of the partnership with Rochford Council
<u>PRINCIPLE D</u> Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of intended outcomes
Issue Identified: 2. Review corporate priorities for 2023/24 Council
<u>PRINCIPLE E</u> Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
Issue Identified: 3. Complete the OneTeam recruitment to the top four tiers of management
Issue Identified: 4. Take stock of the OneTeam transformation programme and set out the future direction
<u>PRINCIPLE F</u> Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
Issue Identified: 5. Review the Treasury Management Strategy
<u>PRINCIPLE G</u> Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability
Issue Identified:

6. Recruit an Independent Person to sit on the Audit Committee to enhance accountability

7. Certification

In the Corporate Strategy 2020-25 Brentwood Borough Council has committed to priorities and expected outcomes in terms of financial stability, early intervention, maximising use of assets and enabling communities.

For such a commitment to be achieved the Council must have a solid foundation of good governance, supported by sound financial management. The Council operates under the principles identified in The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)/ Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) Framework 2016 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government'.

In November 2020 a revised Local Code of Corporate Governance (The Code) was adopted, which details these principles and links to the Business Plan. The Code is supported by a significant range of policies and procedures that form The Governance Framework which sets out how the Council should do what it does.

Each year the Council is legally required to conduct an annual review of the effectiveness of its systems of risk management and internal control, i.e., governance arrangements, through the publication of an Annual Governance Statement (AGS).

This AGS provides assurances on compliance with The Code for the year ending 31st of March 2023 but will include the position up to the date of sign-off of the Annual Accounts.

The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive both recognise the importance of having a solid foundation of good governance and sound financial management.

They have been advised on the outcome of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the Governance Framework and consider that the arrangements provide adequate assurance and continue to be regarded as fit for purpose. They pledge their commitment to address the matters highlighted in this Statement, and to further enhance governance arrangements to enable delivery of the Business Plan.

**Councillor
Leader of the Council**

Chief Executive

Date:

Date: