

## **BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**FROM:** Director of Finance

**REPORT NUMBER:** **H54**

**TO:** OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
(STEWARDSHIP)

**DATE OF MEETING:** 24 June 2008

### **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2007/08**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Consider the proposed Annual Governance Statement, which will be included with the 2007/08 Statement of Accounts
- Appoint 2 Members from this Committee to review the Statement and the supporting evidence.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- (a) Approves the Annual Governance Statement in Appendix A, subject to the further review by two Members as referred to in (c) below.
- (b) Gives its views on any matters that need further consideration.
- (c) Nominates two Members to review the 2007/08 Statement and the adequacy and effectiveness of Internal Audit, based on the supporting evidence.
- (d) Notes that the findings of the review will be considered by the Committee alongside the annual Internal Audit Report at its meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> August.
- (e) Authorises the Chairman of the Strategy Committee to sign the Annual Governance Statement 2007/08 on behalf of that Committee.

The Committee is able to resolve these matters.

(Note: Council will approve the Statement of Accounts for 2007/08 on the 26<sup>th</sup> June, which will include the Annual Governance Statement).

#### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

#### 4. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 4.1 This report is most closely linked with the Council's Significant Business Risk No. 7 - Financial, Performance and Risk Management. Key risks are set out below:

<b>Risk Description</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Seriousness or Impact</b>	<b>Mitigation Measures</b>
The Statement may not be an accurate reflection of the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements.	Low	Critical	The Statement is fully supported by relevant documentation and evidence.

#### 5. **KEY INFORMATION**

##### **Background**

- 5.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations include a statutory requirement to prepare a Statement on Internal Control (SIC) in accordance with proper practices. The SIC has previously been published with the Statement of Accounts. With effect from 2007/08 'proper practice' requires councils to produce and publish an Annual Governance Statement (AGS), which replaces the SIC and covers six laid down Corporate Governance principles. Both the SIC and the new AGS are to be signed by the Chairman of Strategy Committee and Chief Executive.
- 5.2 The new CIPFA/SOLACE governance framework clearly sets out the six fundamental principles of corporate governance; these are:
- Focusing on the purpose of the authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area
  - Members 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 and managing risk
  - Developing the capacity and capability of members and officers to be effective
  - Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust accountability
- 5.3 The proposed AGS for 2007/08 addresses these and is attached at Appendix A. It covers:
- The Council's responsibilities in terms of the governance framework
  - Babergh's governance environment relating to the six laid down corporate governance principles

- The effectiveness of Babergh's arrangements and any significant areas of weakness identified, with proposed actions to address these.
- 5.4 The governance framework is designed to facilitate the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives and to identify and manage risk to a reasonable level. The governance framework is embedded within the Constitution and the systems, policies, procedures and operations in place throughout the Council.

### **The Role of the Overview and Scrutiny Stewardship Committee**

- 5.5 The AGS still covers the system of internal control and risk management, within the overall corporate governance arrangements. This Committee has the responsibility for scrutinising the AGS under its governance responsibilities and it is asked to focus on sections 4 and 5, which set out the key aspects of the review for 2007/08 and the findings.
- 5.6 This provides the opportunity for authorities to consider the robustness of their governance arrangements. In undertaking its role it is suggested that the Committee:-
- Considers the Annual Governance Statement (Appendix A) and the proposed actions to address the issues highlighted
  - Gives its views on any matters that need further consideration
  - Nominates two Members to consider the assurance/evidence gathering arrangements that are in place and be satisfied that the AGS meets the requirements of the new framework
  - Monitors the implementation of the actions required to address the issues highlighted.

### **Assurance Arrangements**

- 5.7 The assurance process used to complete the 2007/08 AGS statement is similar to that previously used to prepare the SIC. The Audit Manager has had responsibility for co-ordinating the collection of evidence and together with the Director of Finance has evaluated assurances and supporting evidence to determine whether they are consistent with the governance framework.
- 5.8 Senior managers have completed assurance statements on internal control. These statements ensure that managers are fully aware of their responsibilities for maintaining a sound system of internal control within the services for which they are responsible.
- 5.9 Best practice recommends that there should be a working group at the centre of the review process, which is given responsibility for evaluating the supporting evidence and assurances relating to the production of the Statement. In future, therefore, it is proposed that an appropriate officer working group should monitor Corporate Governance arrangements generally and progress on addressing the weaknesses highlighted.

## **Review of the Adequacy of Internal Audit**

5.10 An annual review of the adequacy and effectiveness of Internal Audit also has to be undertaken as part of the AGS arrangements. The Director of Finance and the Audit Manager have completed a checklist in relation to this, which covers the following areas:

- Clear scope, terms of reference and audit strategy
- Planning and delivery
- Reporting, professional care and performance
- Independence, ethics, integrity, objectivity, competence
- Relationships with the Audit Committee (this Committee undertakes that role), senior management, external audit and others
- Training and Development

5.11 It is proposed that two Members scrutinise this and put forward any recommendations that may be considered appropriate to strengthen the adequacy and effectiveness of Internal Audit.

## **6. APPENDICES**

Annual Governance Statement

## **7. BACKGROUND PAPERS REFERRED TO:**

None

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**Babergh District Council**

**DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2007/08**

**1. Scope of Responsibility**

- 1.1. The Council is responsible for ensuring that its Corporate Governance Framework is robust and that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards. It is also important that public money is safeguarded, properly managed, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. 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, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.
- 1.2. The Council has approved and adopted a local code of corporate governance, although this is in need of updating to fully comply with the principles of the latest CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government'. A copy of the code is on our website at: <http://www.babergh.gov.uk/Babergh/Home/About+us/How+we+work/Local+Code+of+Corporate+Governance.htm> or can be obtained in paper form from the Corporate Services Division within the Council.
- 1.3. This statement explains how the Council has complied with the local code and the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework. It also reviews compliance in 2007/08. and covers internal control requirements under the Accounts & Audit Regulations. Findings in terms of significant weaknesses are set out in Section 5.

**2. The Purpose of the Governance Framework**

- 2.1. The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and the way in which it accounts to, engages with, and leads the community. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic aims and priorities and to consider whether these have led to the delivery of appropriate, value for money services.
- 2.2. 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 priorities and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is important in terms of identifying and prioritising the risks relating to achieving the Council's aims and to manage them efficiently and effectively.
- 2.3. The governance framework has been reviewed the year ended 31 March 2008 and up to the date of approval of the accounts for the 2007/08 financial year.

### **3. The Governance Framework**

3.1. The key elements of the systems and processes that comprise the Council's governance arrangements are summarised in the sections that follow.

#### **3.2. Focusing on the purpose of the authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area**

3.2.1 The Council aims to deliver high quality services that provide value for money and which are aligned to the needs and priorities of the local community.

3.2.2 It achieves this through an annual State of the District Debate, User Satisfaction Surveys and consultation with Local Strategic Partnerships to develop the Council's vision. This forms the basis for strategic and service planning, shaping the Corporate/Strategic Plan and Local area Agreements.

3.2.3 The Council's new Strategic Plan (for 2008/09 onwards) is based on the Suffolk Strategic Partnership Community Strategy. The Council's vision/ambition and priorities are set out the Strategic Plan and promoted through 'Babergh Matters', the Council's bi-annual publication that is sent to all residents.

3.2.4 The Strategic Plan states the desired outcomes over the next 10 years and provides the framework for engagement and service delivery. It will be supported by three year (medium) term plans aligned with the Council's financial planning cycle. These medium-term plans will focus on priority themes and set out what is to be achieved. They will contain specific targets, actions and timescales against which progress can be monitored and will be aligned with available resources. Progress reports will be provided to Members on a regular basis and will be available to the public on the Website.

3.2.5 The Council's budget reflects the 2007/08 Corporate Plan priorities and the Council's Financial Strategy, which is to keep Council Tax increases to no more than the rate of inflation and to continue to make improvements in the Council's service priority areas. The Capital Programme includes projects that meet the strategic priorities.

3.2.6 There is a basket of key performance indicators and an analysis of performance exceptions are reported to the Overview & Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee on a quarterly basis. These link to each of the Council's corporate priorities.

3.2.7 The Council has a formal complaints procedure, which is publicised via the Council's Website and in other places. This helps the Council to identify areas where service quality is not satisfactory, and to take appropriate actions to improve.

### **3.3. Members and Officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles**

- 3.3.1 The Council has set out clear roles and responsibilities for Members and Officers. The Chairman of Strategy Committee is the principal spokesperson for the Council on major policy issues. The Council appoints a number of Committees to discharge the Council's regulatory and scrutiny responsibilities. Chairmen of Committees are the Council's spokesperson on matters that have been considered by their Committee and there are Member Champions for specific issues.
- 3.3.2 The Council has an approved Constitution which details how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures that are to be followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and demonstrate accountability to local people.
- 3.3.3 The standards of conduct and personal behaviour expected of Members and officers of the Council are defined and communicated through codes of conduct and protocols. These include:
- Members Register of Interest
  - Members and Officers Code of Conduct
  - Scheme of Delegation
  - Member / Officer Protocol
  - Anti-Fraud & Corruption Policy & Whistleblowing Procedure
  - Standards Committee
- 3.3.4 All Committees have clear terms of reference and work programmes to set out their roles and responsibilities. There are Members Seminars and a number of Task Groups that provide the opportunity for Members and officers to work together and consider issues to inform formal decision-making processes.
- 3.3.5 The Council's Chief Executive (and Head of Paid Service) leads the Council's officers and the Corporate Management Team. All staff, including senior management, have clear conditions of employment and job descriptions, which set out their roles and responsibilities. The Human Resources Panel oversees terms and conditions of employment.
- 3.3.6 The Director of Finance, as the S151 Officer appointed under the 1972 Local Government Act, carries overall responsibility for the financial administration of the Council. A corporate finance team is responsible for budget planning and financial management.
- 3.3.7 The Monitoring Officer (Solicitor to the Council) has overall responsibility for legal compliance.

### **3.4 Promoting Values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour**

- 3.4.1 The Council expects all Members and officers to demonstrate the highest standards of propriety and integrity at all times and to lead by example in ensuring adherence to rules, procedures and recommended practices.
- 3.4.2 Member and Officer behaviours are governed by Codes of Conduct, which include a requirement for declarations of interest to be completed by all Members and the Senior Management Group annually. There is an HR Policies and Procedures Handbook that sets out the disciplinary process
- 3.4.3 Member conduct is monitored by a Standards Committee, which also investigates allegations of misconduct by Members.
- 3.4.4 The Council is committed to the prevention, detection and investigation of all forms of fraud and corruption whether they are attempted from within or external to the organisation. The Council has an Anti-Fraud & Corruption Policy and Whistleblowing Procedure, which it regularly brings to the attention of staff. All contractors are informed of the policy and it is available on the Website together with details on how to report fraud or corruption. .

### **3.5 Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk**

- 3.5.1 The Council's Constitution sets out how the Council operates and the process for policy and decision-making.
- 3.5.2 Babergh has adopted "alternative arrangements" for political leadership and decision making, which is also known as the "Fourth Option". Therefore, Babergh does not have a Leader, a Cabinet or Portfolio Holders. Instead of individual named Councillors, responsibility for functions rests collectively with the appropriate Committee. Babergh does, however, have various "Champions", whose responsibility it is to lead on particular issues. The Council's Strategy Committee is roughly equivalent to the Cabinet employed by Councils operating under the political management structures established by the Local Government Act 2000.
- 3.5.3 Councillors who are not on the Strategy Committee can be appointed to one of the two Overview and Scrutiny Committees established by the Council in order to scrutinise policies and performance in delivering and improving services provided for residents.
- 3.5.4 All Committees and the Council conduct their meetings in public at which policy and performance issues of importance to the Council are debated. Overview and Scrutiny Councillors examine performance and specific policies or service areas and make recommendations for improvements to the Strategy Committee and the Council based on the evidence that they have collected.

- 3.5.5 By taking a detailed look at the Council's policies, Overview and Scrutiny Committees work to ensure and promote open and transparent decision-making and democratic accountability. The Council, via its Committees, seeks to encourage greater public involvement and to develop more knowledgeable relationships with partner organisations by involving them in the Committees' work.
- 3.5.6 In addition, Overview and Scrutiny Committees hold the Strategy Committee to account. The Committees examine decisions made by the Strategy Committee and also have the power, under certain circumstances, to "call-in" a decision before it is implemented. They can then suggest to the Strategy Committee, under certain circumstances, that it reconsider its decision.
- 3.5.7 All decisions made by Committees and the Council are made on the basis of written reports, including assessments of financial implications, the risks involved and in accordance with the principles laid down in the constitution:
- 3.5.8 The Overview & Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee is the Council's equivalent of an Audit Committee. The Terms of Reference of the Committee have been drawn up in accordance with CIPFA guidance. The Committee receives reports on:
- Internal Audit including approval of the Internal Audit Work Programme and The Annual Report on Internal Audit
  - External Audit matters including the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter,
  - Risk Management and approves the Risk Management Strategy
  - Use of Resources and Value for Money Assessment
  - The Council's Annual Governance Statement
- 3.5.9 The Council has a duty to ensure that it acts in accordance with relevant legislation. It has developed policies and procedures to ensure that, as far as possible, all officers understand their responsibilities both to the Council and to the public. Senior Management is responsible for ensuring that legislation and policy relating to service delivery are implemented in practice.
- 3.5.10 Two key documents, Financial Regulations and the Contract Procedure Rules are available to all Members and Officers on the Council's intranet (BEN) as well as available to the public on the Website, as part of the Constitution. They are reviewed periodically and any proposed amendments are reported to Members for approval.
- 3.6 Developing the capacity and capability of Members and officers to be effective**
- 3.6.1 The Council aims to ensure that Members and officers of the Council have the skills, knowledge and capacity they need to discharge their responsibilities and recognises the value of well trained and competent people in effective service delivery. All new Members and officers undertake a comprehensive induction to families themselves with protocols, procedures, values, aims and priorities of the council.

3.6.2 Some examples of Member training in 2007/08 include:

- The revised Codes of Member Conduct
- Standards/Ethical Framework
- Leadership Academy
- Risk Management
- Various Planning Matters
- Climate Change
- Effective use of IT

3.6.3 The Council seeks to recruit, retain and develop capable, competent staff who are well trained in up-to-date and relevant skills and techniques. It undertakes training and development to enable employees to raise productivity, quality and customer service in pursuit of sustainable improvement.

3.6.4 The Council encourages all staff to develop their potential within their job roles, from their initial induction throughout their career with the Council. All training undertaken is focused to ensure that the Council is equipped to meet its strategic and business needs. Further, the Council recognises the importance of meeting the needs of Continuous Professional Development as well as personal development for staff.

3.6.5 Training and Development activities are monitored and evaluated to ensure equality of opportunity and effectiveness. All staff are required to undertake training and development activities needed to improve and update their performance at work.

3.6.6 The Council's Performance Review, Appraisal and Development arrangements provide the framework for identifying and defining the detail and level of core skills required and for determining the mechanism for achieving these. All staff receive annual performance appraisals and assessments.

3.6.7 Officers are qualified to undertake statutory responsibilities and have the skills, resources and support necessary to perform these roles effectively. The Monitoring Officer, who is the Solicitor to the Council, is responsible for reporting to the Council on any act or proposed act, by any Committee, Member of officer that could give rise to a contravention of the law, code of practice or mal-administration. The Monitoring Officer also provides professional legal advice to Members and Officers of the Council.

### **3.7 Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust accountability**

3.7.1 The Council's planning and decision-making processes are designed to include consultation with stakeholders and the submission of views by local people.

- 3.7.2 Babergh has a number of consultation arrangements that seek to capture resident's views and feed them into the service and decision-making processes. These include:

**State of the District Event** – a key annual event that informs the Council's strategic/business planning, budget and policy framework. Views of public sector and other bodies, representatives from business, parish councils and the public on the issues facing the district are considered.

**Suffolk Speaks** – a partnership between all Councils, the Primary Care Trusts, Learning and Skills Council, and the Police in Suffolk. The panel is representative of the demographics of each council area across the county and is used for postal questionnaires three or four times a year, seeking views on various service areas.

**Residents' Forum** – Focus Group to provide views on specific issues or aspects of the Council's activities.

**Tenants' Forums** – consider service issues affecting Council House tenants and provide views on key policies and projects.

**Customer Surveys** – statutory and other surveys to seek residents' views on the quality of life in their area, and on a range of services.

**Youth Conference** – held annually it brings young people from schools in the District together to discuss the issues that affect them.

- 3.7.3 'Babergh Matters' communicates the Council's vision and priorities and is delivered to all homes across the district. It is frequently used as a means to consult with the whole district. Around 4,000 people typically respond.

- 3.7.4 Committee meetings are open to the press and public and residents have the opportunity to ask a question of any Committee Chairman, which has been submitted in writing at least two days before the meeting. There are laid down arrangements for planning applicants and others to speak at Development Control meetings.

## **4 Review of Effectiveness**

- 4.1 The Council currently reviews the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control annually. In future, there will be an ongoing review of arrangements through an officer working group. The review of effectiveness is informed by assurances and evidence from managers within the Council who have responsibility for the development and operation of the governance environment, the work of Internal Audit and by reviews undertaken by the external auditors and other inspection agencies.

- 4.1 The following arrangements are relevant to the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework undertaken in 2007/08. They link to the matters set out in sections 3.2 to 3.7:

- The Strategic Plan is based on the Suffolk Community Strategy and reflects the outcome of extensive consultation, analysis of current and future needs, and consideration of current performance.

- The Council is fully committed to community engagement and consultation. The Council works in close partnership with many community and voluntary groups to ensure effective delivery of its services.
- Roles and responsibilities for governance are defined and allocated so that accountability for decisions made and actions taken are clear. These are set out in the Constitution, which also includes a Member/Officer protocol. Main Committees have clear terms of reference and work programmes.
- The Council is committed to developing the skills of Members. The training and development programme and regular Members seminars ensure that they have all the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfil their roles. There is also a comprehensive Member induction programme.
- The Council is committed to developing the skills of officers. Services are managed and delivered by trained and experienced people, all posts have a detailed job description and new staff are provided with a formal induction. Training needs are identified through the appraisal process.
- There are clear scrutiny arrangements to develop policy and monitor the decisions of the Strategy Committee. Committees can 'call-in' a Strategy Committee decision, which has been made but not yet implemented to enable them to consider whether the decision is made in an appropriate manner.
- There was one decision called-in during the year. The call-in procedure was reviewed in March 2008. It concluded that the call-in meeting had successfully followed the process laid down by the Constitution and that the process had been conducted properly.
- The Council maintains an effective Standards Committee, which regulates and oversees the national Code of Conduct. The revised national Code of Conduct was adopted by Babergh in May 2007 and all Members attended training on the Code and received the Standards Board 'Guide for Members' publication. The committee received no complaints for determination from the Standards Board during 2007/08.
- The Council's Overview & Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee's responsibilities provided assurance on the effectiveness of the risk management framework and the adequacy of internal controls. The Council approved an updated Risk Management Strategy in 2007/08, which provides a comprehensive framework for the management of risk throughout the Council.
- A Significant Business Risk Register is in place and appropriate staff have been trained in the assessment, management and monitoring of risks. The Risk Management process is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure its continued relevance to the Council and the Overview and Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee receive quarterly updates on risk management.
- The Committee monitors the performance of internal audit and agrees the internal and external audit plans. A report of each audit, including recommendations for improvements, is submitted to the Director of

Finance, other relevant directors and heads of service. There are periodic reviews of recommendations to ensure that they are acted upon. In addition, Internal Audit also undertakes fraud investigation and proactive fraud detection work.

- Internal Audit reports directly to the Director of Finance, who is also the Section 151 Officer. The Audit Manager also has the right of direct access to the Deputy Chief Executive, the Chief Executive and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee. The internal audit section is subject to regular review by the Council's external auditors and through the requirement to review its effectiveness annually.
- The Council has an Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and Whistleblowing Procedure, which provide measures to enable confidential public and officer concerns to be raised with the Council. In addition, a formal complaints policy exists to deal with other matters of public concern regarding services provided by the Council.
- The Performance Management Framework includes management of Government Performance Indicators and Local Performance Indicators, focusing on a key basket of indicators linked to priorities. Divisional targets are monitored through a quarterly reporting cycle. Data quality is assured through an on-going relationship between the corporate performance team and relevant officers throughout the organisation.
- The Audit Commission's 2007/08 assessment of the Council's arrangements for Use of Resources and Value for Money resulted in a score of 3 out of 4 overall, which is 'performing well'. The Overview and Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee has approved an Improvement Action Plan.
- Audit and inspection reports were received from the Audit Commission during 2007/08 and considered by Members.
- Assurances have been obtained from Corporate Directors and Heads of Service that key elements of the control framework were in place during the year in their departments.

## **5 Significant Governance Issues**

5.1 In previous years the Statement on Internal Control identified items that required improvement. A considerable amount of work has been carried out in respect of corporate business planning, performance management systems and business continuity.

5.2 The following issues affecting the Council's governance framework have been identified in this year's review and actions are needed to further strengthen existing arrangements. An Improvement Action Plan has been produced, based on the findings from this process. The officer working group will monitor progress made against the Plan, with quarterly progress reports. Key areas for further development are set out below:

- Update the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance and communicate to officers and Members.

- Continue to improve and embed certain areas of the Governance Framework and risk management arrangements, both generally and specifically in relation to key partnerships.
- Review and testing of Business Continuity Plans
- Improve procedures for dealing with informal complaints to increase customer satisfaction

5.3 In addition to the above, attention is required to the following issues identified by the Audit Commission in its latest Audit & Inspection report:

- Monitor progress and outcomes against the various areas for further improvement arising from the Council's use of resources assessment Act on recommendations in the 'Partnerships in Leisure' report
- Ensure that progress against key Best Value Performance Indicators continuously improves
- Ensure that the Council has sufficient focus on diversity and equalities

## **6 Chief Executive and Chairman of Strategy Committee Statement of Assurance**

6.1 We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements. We 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.

Signed.....  
Pat Rockall, Chief Executive

Signed .....  
Nick Ridley, Chairman of  
Strategy Committee

Date .....

Date .....