

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 2 OCTOBER 2020

Addendum Agenda item 7 – Assessment of the Corporate Governance Framework

The Governance Committee is recommended to approve the Addendum set out in the Appendix below be added to the Annual Governance Statement for 2019-20 to accompany the Council's Statement of Accounts.

1.1 The review of the Corporate Governance Framework, including the Annual Governance Statement (AGS), has previously been circulated with the agenda for the Committee's meeting on 2 October 2020. (Agenda item 7). Following publication of the agenda for the meeting, advice has been received from the Authority's External Auditor that an update is required to the AGS to further reflect the Authority's response to the Covid-19 pandemic since April 2020 as this constitutes a significant event/development to the governance system.

1.2 Following consultation with the External Auditor, an addendum to accompany the AGS for 2019-20 was agreed to be the best way to provide an up to date commentary on the steps the Authority took in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The attached addendum sets out the significant changes the Authority has made in response to the impact of the pandemic and new powers granted to the Authority under The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

Addendum to Annual Governance Statement 2019/20 produced to provide an up to date commentary on the Authority's governance response to the Covid-19 pandemic

The following should be read in conjunction with the Annual Governance Statement

1.1 The Council responded positively to the implementation of The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, which enable the Council to hold meetings in public by electronic means, in order to operate effectively during the period of the pandemic. The Council agreed to make temporary updates to its Standing Orders, making provision for virtual meetings and associated processes, to be effective for the period during which the regulations apply. The Council also agreed a range of temporary measures to enable the County Council's business to be conducted efficiently throughout the period of disruption due to Covid-19. This included putting in place specific delegations to officers which can be used if necessary, should practical, health or capacity related constraints limit the Council's ability to hold virtual meetings.

1.2 A series of training sessions, including one to one meetings, were held to ensure that all councillors were able to join and participate in virtual meetings. Specific training and guidance has been offered to Chairs of Committees and Lead Members in relation to chairing virtual meetings. Attendance at formal meetings remains good.

1.3 Virtual Meetings under the new regulations have taken place regularly since April including the Full Council, Cabinet, Committees, Panels and individual Cabinet decision making meetings. The reporting and monitoring of performance, finance and ongoing updates to the Corporate Strategic Risk Register reflect issues arising from the pandemic.

1.4 Members have been invited to provide feedback on their experiences of virtual meetings and their views on proposals for the conduct of meetings in the coming months, including ongoing Member support needs. The responses received were considered by the cross-party Member ICT and Development Reference Group which supported the approach being taken.

1.5 All county councillors have been invited to two Whole Council Forums (July and September) at which officers have provided an update in relation to Covid-19 and the implications for the Council. The Forums provide an opportunity for councillors to raise questions and issues in relation to the pandemic which can inform future decisions of the Council.

1.6 The Cabinet has considered a report (which was referred to the Full Council for debate) in relation to the measures taken in response to Covid-19 and on the proposed approach to resetting the Council's activities. The Council is using its existing political and business planning processes to develop its plans. The following principles will guide the planning of Covid-19 recovery for East Sussex County Council services and the Council's wider support for residents and businesses:

- Our usual business planning process (RPPR), led by Cabinet and CMT, will be used to develop a short-term recovery plan 2020/21 and medium/long-term full planning from 2021/22
- The Council's Core Offer, Priority Outcomes and subsidiary Delivery Outcomes will be reviewed and revised as needed to ensure they are right for recovery plans – recognising the fundamental changes that have taken place in society and the way it works and building on the positive lessons we have learnt. Some services we set up in response to the pandemic will need to continue into the foreseeable future (for example help for the shielded cohort) and the impact of decisions we have taken could have long lasting service and financial consequences (for example in ASC).

- The Council's financial resource allocations for current and future years will be reviewed and revised to take account of changes in availability and priorities
- Learning from what has worked well and what has not during the crisis will be fully considered in recovery planning and long-term planning for services and partnerships

1.7 This work will lead to a revised Council Plan and targets and MTFP for this year and the future. A flexible approach to planning and delivery is required as we move through the pandemic. Our integrated monitoring and risk processes provide a vehicle to allow us to do that. Our plans for future years will also need to take into account the broader context in which we are working: the impact of the pandemic on the national economy and our funding prospects, the changed needs of our residents and businesses and the impact of exiting the EU on both the economy and our services.

1.8 In July 2020 the East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board approved the East Sussex Outbreak Control Plan. Planning to prevent and respond to cases of Covid-19 in our communities requires a whole system and multi-agency approach, including the NHS Test and Trace programme. A wide range of stakeholders have contributed and commented on the Plan and will continue to shape its development. More detail on operational delivery elements will be added to the Plan as guidance is produced nationally. The Board approved an updated version of the Plan in September, including an escalation framework and agreed to receive a further report at its December meeting regarding developments and updates.

1.9 The Senior Management Group has been meeting regularly (twice a week) in order to review and evaluate the impact of Covid-19 on service provision and resources and consider future actions.