

## **Annual Governance Statement 2023/2024**

The Council's Annual Governance Statement (AGS) follows the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK 2023/24 and comprises the following sections:

- Scope of responsibility
- The purpose of the governance framework
- The governance framework
- Review of effectiveness
- Update on the significant governance issues that were declared last year
- Significant governance issues for the year-end 2024

### **Scope of responsibility**

Belfast City Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and is used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Council also has a duty under Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 to make arrangements for continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of strategic effectiveness, service quality, service availability, fairness, sustainability, efficiency and innovation.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs and facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

The Council has prepared an Annual Governance Statement, which is consistent with the principles of the new CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (2016 edition)*. This statement explains how the Council has complied with the code and meets the requirements of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland 2015) in relation to the publication of an annual governance statement.

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

The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and the activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads its communities. It enables the Council 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 of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

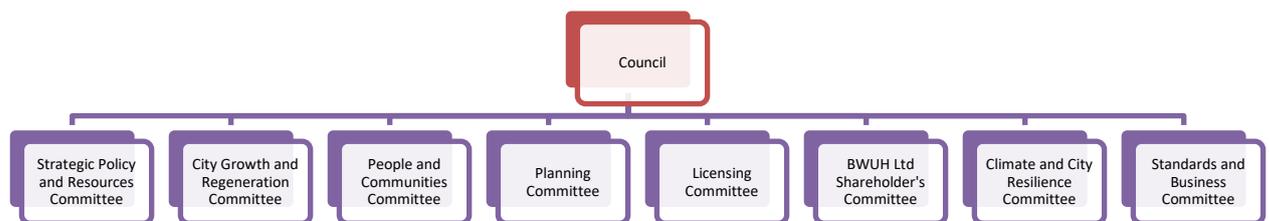
The governance framework continues to be in place at Belfast City Council for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 and up to the date of approval of the Annual Governance Statement

and statement of accounts. The following section sets out the key elements of the governance framework.

### The governance framework

The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Extension of Provisions Relating to Local Authority Meetings) (No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023 provides councils with the flexibility to hold meetings by remote or hybrid means applied up until 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024. The provision of the Coronavirus Act 2020 which allows councils to hold remote/hybrid meetings was not extended and so members must be physically present at Council and Committee meetings from 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024 in order to take part in debates and to vote on any issues which may be raised. As working groups and workshops are not decision-making bodies and are not subject to the same legislation, these continue to be held as hybrid meetings.

Our committee structure, which is based on the full council and eight standing committees is illustrated and described below.



Through the work of committees, our Members oversee the work of the council. All committee decisions need to be ratified by the full council except where committees have been granted delegated authority to make decisions.

The full council, which consists of all 60 elected representatives, is the overarching decision-making body.

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the Council through the development of its corporate plan and other key corporate and cross cutting strategies and policies. It will also ensure effective use of resources and value for money for ratepayers and oversee the Council's relationship with a number of key agencies and partners.

The City Growth and Regeneration Committee is responsible for the development and implementation of strategies, policies, programmes and projects directed to the regeneration and growth of the city in the context of the outcomes agreed in the community and corporate plans and other corporate strategy.

The People and Communities Committee is responsible for the development and implementation of strategies, policies, programmes and projects aimed at improving life at a

local level in the context of the outcomes agreed in the community and corporate plans and other corporate strategy.

The Planning Committee is responsible for all of the Council's planning functions, except those matters, which are delegated to officers or reserved to full Council.

The Licensing Committee is responsible for the consideration of all matters pertaining to policy and legislation in relation to licensing issues.

The Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd Shareholders' Committee is responsible for making the decisions required by the Shareholders' Agreement and ensure that the company complies with the contract for the operation of the venues.

The Climate and City Resilience Committee is responsible for political oversight of the resilience strategy for Belfast, liaising with Belfast Resilience and Sustainability Board who are responsible for monitoring and delivery with the support of Belfast Climate Commission, supporting a targeted approach through existing structures to those issues which pose the greatest risk to the city, its economy and its people. This includes considering the potential implications of climate change for the city of Belfast and for making recommendations to the Council on Belfast City Council's approach to addressing the climate crisis and Council's role and responsibilities at city level.

The terms of reference of the Standards and Business Committee are to: promote, sustain and safeguard the conduct of Councillors within the Council; promote a collaborative working relationship between senior officers and Members; ensure the probity of all the council's proceedings; and review and improve processes in relation to bringing business before the Council, including review of all Notices of Motion, any review of Standing Orders and the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

In addition to the Committees listed in the diagrams above there are 17 Working Groups established which include the Audit & Risk Panel and four Area Working Groups. In addition there is a Party Leaders' Consultative Forum.

The Audit & Risk Panel provides an independent assurance on the adequacy of the Council's risk management framework and associated control environment. It provides an independent scrutiny of the Council's financial and non-financial performance, which is relied upon by the Council, to the extent that it exposes it to risk and weakens the control environment. The Panel reports to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. The Audit & Risk Panel met four times during 2023/24.

The Council's Code of Governance is based on the seven core principles set out in the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework (2016 edition). How we meet these seven core principles is reviewed and updated annually. A summary of the key elements of our governance framework are set out in the following table:

## Our seven principles of good governance

### A: Behaving with integrity

- Shared values communicated via corporate plan, community plan and key strategies
- Codes of conduct for Members and staff
- PDP / appraisal process for Members & staff
- Gifts and hospitality and conflicts of interest policies and registers in place
- Fraud and Raising Concerns policies
- Good Relations Unit
- Equality and Diversity Framework
- Council constitution, standing orders & scheme of delegation
- Expert professional advice
- Partners and contractors required to comply with relevant policies
- Achieving Through People Framework
- Standards and Business Committee
- Accessibility Statement for the updated website
- Social Value Procurement Policy

### B: Ensuring openness

- Council / committee meetings open to the public and agendas / minutes on website
- Belfast Agenda developed via extensive consultation and engagement.
- Corporate plan and annual improvement plan are subject to consultation before agreement
- Statement of Community Involvement for production of the Local Development Plan
- Ongoing consultation and engagement with staff and trade unions
- Corporate communications
- Annual financial report published on the BCC website
- Equality Screening Outcome reports available through the BCC website
- Formal Partnership arrangements with GLL, Active Belfast, arc21, BWUH Ltd, Visit Belfast, Innovation City Belfast
- "Your Say" consultation hub
- Working with Belfast Region City Deal partners

### C: Defining outcomes

- Belfast: Our Recovery plan
- Belfast Agenda outlines long term economic, social and environmental benefits and is refreshed every 4 years
- Belfast Region City Deal Investment Plan
- Cultural Strategy
- Corporate plan outlines the annual contribution to the Belfast Agenda
- City centre regeneration & investment strategy
- Physical Investment Programme
- Leisure transformation programme
- Grant funding processes
- Equality Impact Assessments
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### D: Optimising the achievement of outcomes

- Corporate plan aligned to delivery of Belfast Agenda
- Adoption of the Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP) - Plan Strategy
- Key partner in the Belfast Region City Deal
- Consultation and engagement processes
- Strategic financial management and reporting framework in place.
- Performance management framework
- Regular reports on progress of our performance improvement plan to CMT and SP&R
- Risk management strategy & framework

## E: Developing capacity & capability

- People Strategy
- Achieving Through People Framework
- Benchmarking activity
- Efficiency programme
- Regular performance monitoring of the delivery of improvement objectives
- Learning and development policy
- Health and wellbeing strategy
- Appraisal scheme in place for Chief Officers, Operational Directors / Heads of Service and Senior Managers
- PDPs for officers and Members
- Member capacity building / training
- Continuing Development Programme for members
- Party group briefings

## F: Finance, performance and risk management

- Annual Rate Setting process
- Financial Strategy
- Compliance with CIPFA Financial Management Code
- Performance management framework
- Treasury Management Strategy
- Capital Strategy
- Risk management strategy
- Corporate risk management framework
- Regular reporting of finance, risk and performance
- Audit and Risk Panel
- Internal audit function / annual internal audit strategy and plan in place
- Recommendations Monitor process
- Data protection policy and procedures
- Corporate Fraud Risk Assessment
- Increased data security controls

## G: Transparency, reporting & effective accountability

- BCC website regularly updated
- Publication of key reports including the annual financial report; annual governance statement and; performance improvement report
- Committee support framework to approve papers prior to submission to Members
- AGRS (internal audit) annual assurance statement within the annual governance statement
- Internal Audit effectiveness annually reviewed against public sector internal audit standards, with an independent external review every five years
- Internal / external audit recommendations followed up as part of recommendations monitoring process every six months
- Key governance arrangements in place for the Council's Accountable Body role for the Belfast Region City Deal

The Chief Executive is the Council's designated Chief Financial Officer under the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, responsible for the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs.

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).

We have re-assessed our compliance with the principles of the CIPFA Financial Management Code and have reached the overall conclusion that we are compliant, with improvement still to be made over better integration of strategic plans and resources. The Code outlines three financial management styles – delivering accountability, supporting performance and enabling transformation. Compliance with the Code requires credible proposals to raise financial standards beyond the basic delivery of accountability. The continuing development of the Council's approach to Medium Term Financial Planning will support performance by better alignment of service / corporate plans with financial plans. Planning beyond the annual budget should enable Members and senior management to protect financial sustainability by linking vision, strategy and outcomes. The new financial system was implemented on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024. The analytical capability of the system will be explored after the usefulness of initial reports have been reviewed.

Having considered all the principles of the CIPFA Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption (2014), subject to the implementation of the Corporate Fraud Risk Action Plans, the Council has adopted a response that is appropriate for its fraud and corruption risks and commits to maintain its vigilance to tackle fraud.

The CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit (2019) outlines the five principles that set out the organisation's responsibilities to ensure the Head of Internal Audit (HIA) is able to operate effectively and perform their core duties. The Statement also sets out the core responsibilities of the HIA along with the personal skills and professional standards expected of the HIA. The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS), and the supporting operational arrangements in place, conform to the five principles set out in the CIPFA Statement. This is demonstrated through a self-assessment exercise undertaken by the Head of AGRS. While the principles state that the HIA should not be responsible for preparing the annual governance report, the arrangements within the council, involve AGRS co-coordinating the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement which is then reviewed and agreed by the Corporate Management Team, Audit Assurance Board and Audit and Risk Panel, before being reviewed by Strategic Policy and Resources committee and signed by the Chair of Strategic Policy & Resources and the Chief Executive.

The Council did not report any breaches of personal data to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) during 2023/24. Two incidents were reported directly to the ICO by data subjects as complaints. The ICO was satisfied that a personal data breach had not occurred and took no further action in relation to either incident.

### **Review of Effectiveness**

The following diagram illustrates the Assurance Framework in place that provides information on compliance with the various elements of the Council's Governance Framework, including performance reports, health and safety reports, finance reports, internal audit reports and risk management report



Continued effort has been put into developing and implementing the key elements of an assurance framework within the Council with the key elements being:

- a process whereby senior managers are required to sign annual assurance statements;
- a process whereby Directors are required to sign quarterly assurance statements;
- embedding risk management and developing the arrangements for oversight of the management of these risks;
- business planning and related performance reporting arrangements;
- an Audit and Risk Panel;
- a professional internal audit function, which has been reviewed for effectiveness against the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards; and
- a Health & Safety Assurance Board.

The various in year and year-end reports arising from the Assurance Framework are reviewed and approved by the Audit and Risk Panel and Strategic Policy and Resources Committee annually.

In addition, the review of the effectiveness of the Governance Framework is also informed by:

- the annual review and update of the Code of Governance;
- comments or recommendations made by the external auditors during their annual audit; and
- the Head of Audit Governance and Risk Services (AGRS) annual assurance statement for the period ending 2023/24, which gives an opinion on the Council's risk and control environment.

### **Head of Internal Audit Opinion**

As Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS), on the basis of work carried out, I can provide a reasonable assurance regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control.

We developed our audit plan in consultation with management to ensure that our audit work was focussed on the areas where assurance was most valuable. Member and management agreement of this plan combined with delivery of the majority of this plan signifies members and managers recognition of the importance of receiving independent assurance over the council's risk, control and governance frameworks and provided me with sufficient evidence to support my assurance statement.

My opinion is based on completion of audits in the audit plan for 23/24; programme and project assurance and advisory work undertaken for a number of fundamental corporate IT projects; other advisory work and; quarterly assurance statements from senior management on compliance with risk management and internal control systems.

Specifically my opinion is based on the following:

- Evidence from areas subject to detailed internal audit during 2023/2024, in that AGRS has been able to provide positive statements of assurance with the majority of audits falling into the 'some improvement needed' category - the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier of assurance in the 4 tier model (see Table 2 at section 3 of this report).
- Provision of assurance and advisory work for major programmes and projects including the new accounting system which went live on 1 May 2024, in addition to real time advisory work on grants / funding processes.
- The results of the recommendations monitor exercises completed in September 2023 and April 2024.

- The work that was undertaken to support management in their quarterly review and update on the management of the corporate risks that could potentially impact on delivery of our corporate plan and priorities.
- The work that was undertaken to complete the review of the Corporate Fraud Risk Assessments and to support management in the development of associated fraud risk mitigation plans.
- The completion of the National Fraud Initiative, with no fraud identified.
- Quarterly assurances from senior management on the management of key risks and maintenance of internal control systems.
- The evidence set out in the review of the Council's Code of Governance and Annual Governance Statement regarding the range of key assurance and governance arrangements that the Council has in place to direct / oversee its activities.

However, some weaknesses and areas for improvement have been identified through audit work. These have been reported in detail to the Council's Audit Assurance Board and Audit and Risk Panel during 2023/24 through quarterly progress reports. In addition, I have highlighted, where appropriate, where further action is required to implement agreed audit actions. The key issues I would highlight in this statement are as follows:

- While AGRS was able to provide positive statements of assurance in the majority of audits completed in 2023/24, three areas resulted in 'major improvement' assurance levels:
  - Corporate Risk Review – Resilience Strategy
  - Open Spaces and Streetscene
  - Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd
 It is important that the action plans for the above audits are implemented in as timely a manner as possible.
- The most recent recommendations monitor exercise completed in April 2024, showed good progress being made in the implementation of audit actions. It is important that this commitment to ensuring that there is a robust control environment to support delivery of services, programmes and priorities continues.
- Looking ahead, I highlight the importance of the ongoing development of the councils approach to medium term financial planning and adequate and effective programme management and performance management processes to support the delivery of the new corporate plan and priorities for 2024-28. Following the new financial system going live on 1 May 2024, I underline the importance of obtaining assurance over the effectiveness of the controls in operation and to this end our plan for 24/25 sets aside time for this work.

Limitations – the most recent External Quality Assessment (EQA) of AGRS found strong evidence that AGRS is viewed as making a positive contribution to the continuous improvement of governance, risk management and internal control in the Council and conforms to the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. One of the recommendations for improvement arising from the EQA was that my annual assurance report should highlight the limitations that result from AGRS' role in supporting the Council's risk management arrangements. In this regard I highlight that AGRS is responsible for assisting the Director in establishing, maintaining and supporting the implementation of the council's Risk Management Strategy. This places limitations on AGRS' ability to assess the overall effectiveness of the Council's risk management arrangements. To manage these limitations and to preserve the independence and objectivity of AGRS a number of safeguards have been put in place including resource planning to manage boundaries between our advisory and assurance work; self-assessments against best practice and periodic external assurance reviews of the councils arrangements for risk management.

Public Sector Internal Audit Standards - I can confirm that the AGRS Service has conformed to Public Sector Internal Audit Standards during 2023/24. A quality assurance and improvement programme is in place including internal review of work, annual assessment against professional standards, quarterly progress and performance reporting to the Assurance Board and Audit & Risk Panel. An external quality assessment of AGRS took place in 2022 and this confirmed the Service's compliance with professional standards.

### **Update on the Significant Governance Issues that were declared last year**

Five issues were declared last year and three continue to be declared as issues in this year's statement regarding Financial Planning, Digital Information Security and the Brexit Implementation Programme for Port Health. Two issues relating to Recruitment Challenges and the Belfast Region City Deal are no longer considered to be significant governance issues for the year-end 2024 and an update on the work that was completed last year to manage these issues is set out below.

### **Recruitment Challenges**

A Strategic Director of City Operations was appointed in November 2023. A Strategic Director of Place & Economy was appointed in January 2024. The recruitment process to appoint a City Solicitor/Director of Legal & Civic Services is underway and due to complete in early May 2024. This will complete the structure of the Corporate Management Team.

The Council continued to undertake a high volume of recruitment activity including campaigns for difficult to fill roles for example security staff, environmental health officers, HGV drivers which provides greater stability across departments.

The Council also held a number of job fairs to increase applicant rates to a wide variety of roles and ran another high volume permanent recruitment campaign for the basic entry role of general operatives which has further increased stability in front line services.

The Council's People Strategy and 3-year action plan was launched in October 2023 with a focus on how we retain, attract and develop staff and upskill our existing talent to have adequate succession plans to fulfil vacancies at all levels including senior management.

The council will continue to undertake recruitment campaigns throughout 2024-25 to create greater stability across council departments.

### **Belfast Region City Deal**

Significant progress has been made during 2023-24 with the BRCD well into delivery. To date 15 business cases have been approved with a combined approximate project value of £660m and 8 Contracts for Funding have been signed for projects with an approximate value of £430m. Over £7m in funding has been drawn down and two full business cases have also been approved.

The contracts for funding for a number of projects particularly in the tourism investment pillar, were subject to delays due to new requirements in relation to subsidy control. The PMO and partners have invested significant resources to deal with this issue including engaging with the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) and procuring specialist legal advice. As a result two Subsidy Assessments were submitted and both received positive reports from the CMA. Draft contracts for funding for three tourism projects have now been developed and are expected to be signed in the coming weeks.

Partners continue to consider the inflationary challenges as projects progress and in some cases have committed additional funding to projects from their own organisations' budgets. This will continue at individual project level and at programme level the partnership will engage with government in relation to value re-engineering, benefits realisation and the identification of additional funding where appropriate.

### **Significant Governance Issues for the year-end 2024**

The significant governance issues for the year-end 2024 were identified through review of the risks in the Corporate Risk Register and review of the Directors' Annual Assurance Statements.

The most significant issues for the Council are listed below and have been carried forward from last year:

1. Financial Planning
2. Digital Information Security / Digital Strategy
3. Brexit Implementation Programme for Port Health

More information on these significant governance issues is provided on the following pages.

#### **1. Financial Planning**

The 5-step finance strategy applied in 2020/21 to deal with the COVID-19 issue and extended into the 2021/22 and 2022/23 financial years was further extended into 2023/24 and reviewed quarterly due to the continuing economic crises. This strategy remained in place for the full financial year.

Members had previously agreed the creation of two additional specified reserves to deal with

- 1) Covid Costs/Income Losses
- 2) Rate Base Losses.

The 5-step strategy allowed the council to manage additional costs/loss of income due to covid via in year budget savings and the use of the Covid Costs/Income Losses specified reserves. As part of the year-end review of the Council's financial position, these will be reviewed taking consideration of the current economic.

During the 24/25 rate setting process income and expenditure were reviewed in detail resulting in new and additional income streams being agreed. This resulted in a rate increase which will provide a sustainable financial position for the Council without the reliance on the 5-step finance strategy introduced in 2021/22.

The challenges faced by the Council over the past few years have been unprecedented and are likely to continue given the on-going global unrest and the resultant economic impacts. As part of the 2023/24 rate setting process, members agreed a strategy to deal with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the 23/24 budgets. To mitigate the impact on the 24/25 rate setting process a significant efficiency programme has been developed to look at cost savings through reviewing category and contract management, maximising income generation opportunities, exploring new and additional income streams and the use of enhanced expenditure controls.

#### **2. Digital Information Security / Digital Strategy**

Digital information security continues to be a significant governance issue and is overseen through the Council's risk management processes by the Council's Corporate Management Team. Digital Services has implemented the following additional controls to manage and have better visibility of the growing threats in this area:

- Completion of penetration tests.
- Completion of Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard attestation.
- Ongoing delivery of a Security Awareness programme through regular five-minute online training modules on a range of issues that pose a cyber risk for our network.
- Unannounced tests to help determine where future support is required.
- Implementation of Public Key Infrastructure to enhance network access control.
- Activation of Always-On Virtual Private Network to ensure all homeworking access is managed through our security infrastructure.
- Mobile device management using Microsoft Intune currently being rolled out for all new mobile phones.
- Completion of firewall upgrades.
- Draft Ransomware incident response plan.
- Cloud services access report reviewed by Security Oversight Group.

The Digital information Security programme will continue to focus on priority areas that are most important to enhance the council's cyber security controls, including:

- Cyber security incident response.
- Identity management.
- Cloud strategy.
- Maturity assessment priorities.

Additional actions to be undertaken to further mitigate this key corporate risk in 2024/25 include:

- Complete Corporate Management Team Cyber Security Exercise.
- Complete Ransomware Playbook.
- Carry out external Security Information and Event Management engagement to improve threat detection in the Microsoft 365 environment.
- Implement agreed Cloud security governance.
- Network access control roll out to be completed.
- Following a review of local government pilots complete a new maturity assessment based on the new National Cyber Security Centre Cyber Assessment Framework.

An internal audit highlighted issues with the management of the corporate risk on the strategic approach to the use of data, including future ownership of this risk. CMT has approved the creation of a Data and Analytics Board to be chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Corporate Services. A new Digital Strategy with the vision to make the best use of digital and data to deliver excellent public services and inclusive growth in the Belfast City Region has been approved by the Corporate Management Team. The main objectives of the Digital Strategy relate to Digital Public Services; Information as an Asset; Digital City Innovation and; Digital Capability. The strategy will now be taken to the Strategic Policy & Resources committee.

ICT capability is an intrinsic pillar of the overall operating model of the Council and it important that we have the right skills within Digital Services and across the Council. Attracting new talent is becoming problematic across the service but particularly in specialist areas such as Cyber Security

and Application Development. Digital Services has established a workforce planning group to review and determine future skills and development needs across the service.

Additional actions that are planned to be carried out to mitigate this risk in 24-25 include:

- Create action plan based on the feedback from the workforce planning group.
- Create a new apprenticeship role in the Infrastructure team.
- Review the use of employment academies.
- Review recruitment practices.

### **3. Brexit Implementation Programme for Port Health**

Throughout 2023/24 the Council has continued to work with partners and stakeholders to ensure the Council meets its current statutory duties, while also taking steps to prepare for the phased implementation of Windsor Framework statutory requirements.

The programme of work has focused on securing temporary funding for 2024/25 (currently allocated on an annual basis) and preparing for future review of staffing and operations once a longer term funding model is identified by Government.

The Council has also worked with Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to ensure Council requirements are taken into account for the construction of a new permanent and purpose built product inspection facility at the Port, and to ensure any required upgrades and maintenance of the temporary inspection facilities at the Belfast Point of Entry sites including Corry Place.

Further work being taken forward under the programme includes further development of IT systems to streamline processes and joint working.

Details of the phasing implementation of some aspects of the Windsor Framework in 2024/25 and 2025/26 is yet to be confirmed including arrangements for fees and charges.

Some uncertainty remains regarding volumes of checks required and the extent to which businesses may eventually realign trading routes, as this is dependent on the final Windsor Framework arrangements and also the potential impacts of new controls at GB ports under the UK's Border Target operating model for EU goods being imported to GB. The Council are liaising closely with Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, DEFRA and Food Standards Authority to ensure operational readiness.

Further work will be required in 2024/25 and beyond to develop a longer term staffing model, and to secure a sustainable funding arrangement to support the service going forward and IT development for the new facility.

**Signed:** .....

Chair Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

**Signed:** .....

Chief Executive Officer