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| Subject | Corporate Assurance Plan Report 2025-26 | Status | For Publication |
| Report to | Audit and Governance Committee | Date | 06/03/2025 |
| Report of | Head of Corporate Assurance | | |
| Equality Impact Assessment | Not Required | | |
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1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this paper is to present to members of the Audit and Governance Committee (The Committee) the draft Corporate Assurance Plan for 2025-26.

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that: -

- i. the draft Corporate Assurance Plan for 2025-26 is approved in principle whilst acknowledging the need for the Head of Corporate Assurance, in consultation with the Director and the Chief Finance Officer, to exercise her professional judgement during the year to apply the Plan flexibly according to priority, risk and resources available; and**
- ii. the Audit and Governance Committee receive quarterly monitoring reports from the Head of Corporate Assurance to demonstrate progress against the Plan including information where the Plan has materially varied from the original Plan.**

3. Background Information

3.1 Corporate Assurance is an important and influential aid to senior management and corporately aims to help the organisation achieve its objectives and priorities by ensuring there is an appropriate and effective internal control, risk, and governance framework. The overall opinion issued each year by the Head of Corporate Assurance is used as a key source of assurance to support the preparation of the statutory Annual Governance Statement. Corporate Assurance also supports the Authority's statutory officers in discharging their responsibilities.

3.2 The Corporate Assurance plan is important because it sets out the components of the governance, risk and internal control environment that need to be reviewed. In addition, it provides a statement of intent and a performance target for Corporate Assurance and subsequent accountability to the Director, Chief Finance Officer, the Senior Management Team (SMT) and the Audit and Governance Committee. It is also important that the resources of the Corporate Assurance Service are utilised effectively. This paper sets out the methodology to demonstrate how this will be achieved.

3.3 Corporate Assurance adopts a risk-based approach to identifying areas to be included in the plan, the performance of its work and to ensure that the Corporate Assurance Team

assigns its resources to the key areas of risk and priority facing the organisation in achieving their objectives and therefore where the greatest value can be added.

- 3.4 This risk-based framework aims to provide a logical basis to compile the annual Corporate Assurance plan, inform likely priorities for future plans and ensure that the scope of work enables the service to provide appropriate and sufficient evidence in support of the assurance opinion provided on the adequacy, effectiveness and reliability of the organisation's risk management, governance, and internal control processes.
- 3.5 The process outlined complies with the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) which require the plan to be risk-based and informed by the organisation's risk management, performance management and other assurance processes.

4. Basis of the Draft Corporate Assurance Audit Plan 2025-26

4.1 Risk Management Arrangements

Risk Maturity: The approach has taken into account the risk maturity of the organisation to consider whether reliance can be placed on the organisation's risk management and other governance processes for identifying areas for assurance coverage. Risk maturity has been assessed as "risk managed" which confirms that there is an enterprise-wide approach to risk management which is developed and communicated. The Corporate Assurance approach therefore provides for an independent review of the risk management process to be undertaken and the application of risk management to be challenged on an ongoing basis as part of each Corporate Assurance review.

Risk Registers: Corporate Assurance aims to provide assurance to management, Members, and other stakeholders that the organisation's risks are being effectively identified and adequately mitigated. Risks have been identified and assessed through reviews of the strategic and operational risk registers.

4.2 Corporate Governance Framework:

The Governance Assurance Framework underpins every organisational function and activity, and it is therefore essential that this is reviewed in order that assurances can be given regarding its adequacy and effectiveness.

The Corporate Assurance plan contributes to this process and specific governance reviews are undertaken in order to provide assurance in respect of the organisation's framework. Examples include financial management, contracts / procurement, information security / governance, risk management and HR. Other important elements of the governance framework include health and safety/wellbeing and safeguarding.

4.3 Governance 'Themes':

All risks, review work, findings and implications are governance "themed" for the purposes of linking Corporate Assurance coverage to risks and assurances. These themes have been based on the key areas of a governance assurance framework. Functionality within the 'Audit Management System' will enable reports covering the defined themes to be produced on assurance work completed during a given period.

4.4 Chief Finance Officer:

Mandatory work supports the fulfilment of statutory responsibilities in ensuring the proper administration of the organisation's financial affairs. This work also enables the Head of Corporate Assurance to form her opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the governance, risk, and internal control environment. This work includes:

- On a risk basis, a review of core financial systems to ensure there are adequate controls in place to produce reliable financial information and accurate and complete statutory annual accounts. This Corporate Assurance work is considered by External Audit when carrying out their audit of the Authority's statement of accounts.
- Review of the financial administration and arrangements for safeguarding cash, assets, and financial interests. This includes work which is targeted towards areas with a high risk of misappropriation, misuse, fraud, or error. The selection of areas for review in any one year is made following an assessment identifying the areas of greatest risk.
- Ensuring that data matches identified through the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) have been investigated and resolved and reviewing the organisation's risk management arrangements.

4.5 Cumulative Knowledge and Experience

An important element of Corporate Assurance planning is the application of knowledge and experience through the review of key plans, reports, press coverage and national issues.

In addition, the knowledge of existing management and internal control environments, including information relating to any system changes and a professional judgement on the risk of fraud or error has been taken into account along with the outcome of the National Fraud Initiative.

Other considerations have included the following:

- Business plans and the significance / impact of the changes on the control framework.
- Previous assurance report opinions.
- The results of the follow-up of agreed management actions.
- The elapsed time since any previous coverage.
- External assurance provided in relation to a particular risk or risks as part of external inspection, intervention, and assurance activity. Corporate Assurance is mindful to avoid any possible duplication of effort in this regard.

4.6 Follow-up Work:

Targeted follow-up work is designed to maximise the benefit of the original work, by ensuring that the agreed management actions in response to findings and implications have been completed and the appropriate outcomes achieved.

4.7 Responsive Work:

An allowance is made within the plan to deal with requests for advice and unplanned Corporate Assurance work which arise throughout the year. The work usually follows requests from SMT / Chief Finance Officer for support and advice, and specific issues arising during the course of individual assurance reviews. Corporate Assurance's

flexibility to respond promptly to issues of this nature is highly valued and can often highlight some of the more significant items of concern and areas for improvement.

Careful consideration will be given to ensure the right balance is struck between allocating resources to planned work and maintaining a contingency of days in order to respond to any request for advice and support as outlined above.

4.8 Allocated Days

The number of planned days in the indicative Plan for 2025-26 is 207. This is a slight increase of 7 planned days, the plan being 200 days in 2024-25.

4.9 Consultation

The Director, SMT and the Chief Finance Officer have been consulted in terms of the approach, risk assessment process and content of the plan.

5. **Emerging Risks and Revisions to the Plan**

5.1 Following approval of the draft Corporate Assurance Plan by the Audit and Governance Committee, it is subject to on-going review throughout the year. This is to ensure that it remains relevant and linked to the Authority's strategic objectives.

5.2 Progress against the plan is regularly monitored as part of Corporate Assurance's performance management arrangements and is reported quarterly to the Audit and Governance Committee. Any amendments to the plan in terms of unplanned, deleted, or deferred work will be agreed with the Director and Chief Finance Officer and reported to the Audit and Governance Committee.

6. **Implications**

6.1 The proposals outlined in this report have the following implications:

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| Financial | The cost of the services of the Corporate Assurance Team is contained within the budget and is periodically invoiced. |
| Human Resources | n/a |
| ICT | n/a |
| Legal | Section 73 of the Local Government Act 1985 requires the Authority to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs; and Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 requires the Authority to maintain an adequate and effective system of Corporate Assurance (Internal Audit) of its accounting records and of its system of internal control. This report does not contain any information which is exempt under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. |
| Procurement | n/a |

Sharon Bradley CMIIA
Head of Corporate Assurance

Background Papers

| Document | Place of Inspection |
|--|--|
| Background papers and other sources of reference include: Corporate Assurance Charter 2024-26, MK Insight (Audit Management System), Public Sector Internal Audit Standards 2017 | Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, Westgate Plaza, Barnsley. |

Draft Corporate Assurance Plan 2025-26

| Job Title | Indicative Scope | Governance Areas |
|--|---|-------------------------|
| Advice | Provision of advice, as and when requested. | All |
| Advice and Support - HoCA | Provision of advice and support from the HoCA, as and when requested. | All |
| Planning & Feedback | Day to day management of annual assurance plan, including scheduling of resources and incorporating any revisions. Research across the sector. | All |
| Follow Up of Agreed Management Actions (AMAs) | Follow up and update of the status of agreed management actions (AMAs) from individual assurance assignments. | All |
| Annual Assurance Planning | To discuss and develop an agreed annual assurance plan for 2026-27 | All |
| Audit & Governance Committee | Preparation of reports and attendance at the Audit & Governance Committee meetings. Liaison with the Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee. | All |
| Audit & Governance Committee Awareness Session | To provide training and support to members of the Audit & Governance Committee on the Assurance Framework. | All |
| Client Liaison | To prepare for and attend client plan update meetings, periodic attendance at SMT etc. | All |
| AGS Process | To provide advice, support, and guidance to management during the transition to the new enhanced Governance Compliance Statement. | All |
| NFI | To monitor the undertaking of the required data matching exercises. | DQ; EI; FM; RC |
| Risk Management | To provide assurance that the Risk Management Framework is fit for purpose and that risks are being effectively and efficiently managed / monitored. | DM; RM |
| DPO Assurance Advice / Support | To provide advice, support and guidance to management on DPO assurance. | IG; PM; LC; DM |
| Data Quality | To provide advice, support and guidance re data ownership, quality and integrity across the organisation. To include a review of the Data Quality Improvement Plan. | IG; IS; PM |
| Cybersecurity | To provide independent assurance that the cyber security, backup and disaster recovery arrangements are robust, comply with UK GDPR requirements and mitigate the risks of accidental loss, destruction, manipulation and damage of data. | DM; ER; IG; IS; RM |
| Procurement Compliance | To follow up on the lessons learned arising from the Procurement Compliance review undertaken in 2022/23, providing assurance that these have been considered and factored into future procurement processes. | CP; DM; FM |
| Performance Management Framework | To provide advice, support and guidance to management during implementation of the Performance Management Framework. (to include Management Information / Reporting and Workflows). | DM; DQ; EI; HR; PM |

| Job Title | Indicative Scope | Governance Areas |
|--|--|-------------------------|
| Contract Management | To provide advice, support and guidance to management during the development and implementation of a Contract Management Framework. | CP; DM; FM; PP; PS |
| Member Learning & Development | To provide assurance that the member Learning & Development Programme is fit for purpose and includes appropriate training to support members in delivery of their roles and responsibilities. | DM; PM; RM |
| Core Financial System - Main Accounting (excl. Budget Management) | To provide assurance that systems and controls are robust and operating effectively and efficiently. To include General Ledger processes and Bank Reconciliations). | FM; DQ; IG; AM |
| Core Financial System - Purchase Management (Purchase to Pay) | To provide assurance that systems and controls are robust and operating effectively and efficiently. | FM; DQ; IG; AM |
| Core Financial System - Accounts Receivable | To provide assurance that systems and controls are robust and operating effectively and efficiently. | FM; DQ; IG; AM |
| Core Financial System - Other Benefits (incl. Transfer Values / Lump Sums / Rechargeable Pensions) | To provide assurance that systems and controls are robust and operating effectively and efficiently. | FM; DQ; IG; AM |
| Core Financial System - Pensioner Payroll (UPM) | To provide assurance that systems and controls are robust and operating effectively and efficiently. | FM; DQ; IG; AM |
| Core Financial System - Fund Contributions | To provide assurance that systems and controls are robust and operating effectively and efficiently. | FM; DQ; IG; AM |
| Core Financial System - Treasury Management | To provide assurance that systems and controls are robust and operating effectively and efficiently. | FM; DQ; IG; AM |
| Core Financial System - Accounting for Deals | To provide assurance that systems and controls are robust and operating effectively and efficiently. | FM; DQ; IG; AM |
| Budget Management / Monitoring | To provide assurance that the revised budget management arrangements are robust, effective and efficient with clearly defined processes to be adopted, roles and responsibilities. | DM; FM |
| Pensions Review Process - Child Pensions | To provide assurance that the pensions review process is operating effectively. Specific focus on child pensions. | FM; RC |
| Annual Benefits Statements | To provide assurance that the processes to complete the statement are effective and efficient. This is a statutory function, and processes are being revised following a system upgrade. Statement due to be completed in August 2025. | FM; RC |

| Job Title | Indicative Scope | Governance Areas |
|---|---|------------------------------------|
| Pensions Saving Statements | To provide assurance that the processes to complete the statement are effective and efficient. This is a statutory function, and processes are being revised following a system upgrade. Statement due to be completed in September 2025. | FM; RC |
| Regulatory / Material Breaches | To provide assurance that the mechanism for recording and reporting on regulatory / material breaches is fully embedded, and that relevant training has been provided to all staff. | DM; EI; IG; IS; PM; RC |
| Staff Payroll and HR System - Design and Implementation | To provide advice, support and guidance to management during the design and implementation stages of the Payroll and HR System(s). Currently Flexipay and T&A. The systems and processes need modernising incl. workflows e.g. online expenses claims, and better interfacing with the Internet site for recruitment. | DM; DQ; IG; FM; AM; CP; IS; PM; PP |
| Recruitment, Selection and Retention | To provide independent assurance that the Recruitment, Selection and Retention process is being undertaken in accordance with the approved policy, is consistent and also effective and efficient. | DM; ER; FM; HR; RM |
| Contract Management - New Custodian | To provide advice, support and guidance to management on contract management arrangements following appointment of the new Custodian (to include transactional testing on assets managed by the new Custodian). | IS; IG; PC; PM; PP; BC; DM; RM |
| Investment Oversight Model | To provide advice, support and guidance to management following implementation of the Investment Oversight Model. | AM; CP; DM; ER; FM; IG; PM; RC; RM |
| General Contingency | Small unallocated provision of days to accommodate changes in the scope of work, ad hoc requests beyond advisory and general unplanned work. | All |

Governance Areas – Key:

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| AM | Asset Management | IG | Information Governance/ Security |
| CP | Procurement, Commissioning and Contract Mgt | IS | Information Systems Management |
| DM | Governance / Decision Making Arrangements | PM | Performance Management and Data Quality |
| EI | Ethical Standards and Conduct Mgt | PP | Project / Programme Management |
| EQ | Equalities and Inclusion | PS | Partnership, Relationship & Collaboration Governance |
| ER | Business Continuity and Emergency Resilience | RC | Regulatory Compliance |
| FM | Financial Management | RM | Risk Management |
| HR | Workforce / HR Management | | |
| HS | Health and Safety | | |