

Report to the Audit and Governance Committee



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report reference: AGC-007-2009/10

Date of meeting: 21 June 2010

Portfolio: Finance and Economic Development

Subject: Annual Governance Statement 2009/10

Responsible Officer: Brian Bassington (01992 564446).

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

The Committee is requested to consider, comment upon and approve the draft Governance Statement for 2009/10.

Executive Summary:

The Council's Statutory Statement of Accounts is included elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting. The Accounts have been prepared in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 (as amended by the Accounts and Audit Regulations (Amendment) (England) 2006). Within the Regulations, and in accordance with defined 'proper practice', there is a mandatory requirement to publish an Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The arrangements are designed to provide the Authority with assurance regarding the adequacy of its governance arrangements, and identifying where those arrangements need to be improved.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To provide the Committee with the opportunity to scrutinise the draft Governance Statement.

Other Options for Action:

No other options.

Report:

1. In accordance with good practice the governance statement should include the following information:

- (a) an acknowledgement of responsibility for ensuring there is a sound system of governance;
- (b) an indication of the level of assurance that the systems and processes that comprise the authority's governance can provide;
- (c) a brief description of the key elements of the governance framework, including reference to group or partnership activities where those activities are significant;
- (d) a brief description of the process that has been applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance arrangements; and

(e) An outline of the actions taken, or proposed, to deal with significant governance issues.

2. The production of an AGS enables the Authority to use the review process positively and proactively to deliver assurance about governance arrangements within the Authority to stakeholders, and to develop better arrangements where the review finds areas in need of improvement. The process involves a comparison of achievements against the principles set out in the Authority's Local Code of Governance, and supports an intention and commitment to provide good governance.

3. The Annual Governance Statement is the product of an annual review by the Authority, of the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements. This includes an assessment of the effectiveness of its internal control arrangements. The AGS is published with the Statement of Accounts.

4. The AGS is derived partly from detailed reviews by all Service Directors of the effectiveness of the governance arrangements operating within their Directorate, by reference to a detailed checklist incorporating the key elements within the Local Code of Governance. As part of this process Directors have considered available evidence to demonstrate that these governance systems and processes are working effectively and as intended. All Directors have provided assurance statements indicating the level of assurance that can be placed on the effectiveness of key controls operating at service level. These statements are intended to be a balanced representation of the arrangements in place during the year, and to highlight those areas where improvement is required. Significant issues are commented upon in the Governance Statement.

5. Internal Audit focuses its work on providing an independent and objective opinion on the Council's internal controls, and submits an annual report and quarterly monitoring reports to this Committee, where significant audit findings and improvement areas are highlighted. The Chief Internal Auditor is required to include in the annual audit report an opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's internal control environment, drawing attention to any issues that are relevant to the preparation of the Governance Statement. The annual audit report for 2009/10 is included on the agenda for this meeting, and includes an opinion that satisfactory assurance can be given regarding the adequacy of the Council's internal control system in 2009/10.

6. As part of the 'Use of Resources' assessment, the Authority's External Auditors will consider the arrangements in place for the preparation of the AGS, including the degree to which the Authority can demonstrate corporate involvement and ownership of its governance arrangements. The most recent Use of Resources assessment in 2009 scored the Authority at 2 (performing adequately) out of 4 for internal control.

Resource Implications:

From existing resources.

Legal and Governance Implications:

No specific implications.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

No specific implications.

Consultation Undertaken:

Corporate Governance Group and Service Directors.

Background Papers:

CIPFA Internal Audit Code of Practice, Audit reports and files.

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

The preparation of the Annual Governance Statement is a key part of the Council's governance arrangements in demonstrating that there is a continuous review of the Council's internal control and risk management systems. In considering the Statement, the Audit and Governance Committee should be assured that any risks to the achievement of the Council's objectives are being managed via the action plan.

Equality and Diversity:

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? No

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? No

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?
There are no specific equalities impacts.

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?
There are no specific equalities impacts.