



**Governance & Audit
Committee**

Tuesday 9th March 2021

Subject: Combined Assurance Report 2020/21

Report by:

Monitoring Officer

Contact Officer:

Corporate Policy and Governance Manager &
Deputy Monitoring Officer

Purpose / Summary:

To present the Council's Combined Assurance
Report for 2020/21.

RECOMMENDATION(S): The Committee are asked to:

- 1. Approve the report**
- 2. Be assured that the findings illustrate that the Council's governance framework is operating effectively.**

IMPLICATIONS

Legal: None

(N.B.) Where there are legal implications the report **MUST** be seen by the MO

Financial: FIN/123/21/TJB

None from this report.

Staffing: None

(N.B.) Where there are staffing implications the report **MUST** have a HR Ref

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights: None

NB: Please explain how you have considered the policy's impact on different groups (for example: young people, elderly, ethnic minorities, LGBT community, rural residents, disabled, others).

Data Protection Implications : None

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities: None

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations: None

Health Implications: None

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report :

Wherever possible please provide a hyperlink to the background paper/s

If a document is confidential and not for public viewing it should not be listed.

Risk Assessment : None

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of the Combined Assurance Report is to produce a record of assurances against our critical activities and risks. It provides an overview of assurance across the Council making it possible to identify where assurances are present, their source and where there are potential assurance 'unknowns or gaps'. It offers a tri-angulated view of assurance with separate opinion provided by management; corporate and/or third party assurance and Internal Audit. The Combined Assurance Report is produced annually and this report covers the year ending 31st March 2021.

2 Combined Assurance Report

- 2.1 This is the latest Combined Assurance Report undertaken at West Lindsey District Council. It provides a view on assurance systems and services for the year ending March 2021. The report is available as Appendix 1.
- 2.2 The report details the methodology that was used and the levels of assurance that we currently have. The assurance assessment, as explained in the report, is based on the 'three levels of assurance' model.
- 2.3 By conducting this work, we are in a position to be able to identify where we need to obtain further assurance and at what levels. The findings will be used to focus on areas for improvement and potentially form the issues to be addressed within the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

3. Findings

- 3.1 This report, as presented, represents a realistic, yet positive picture of the levels of assurance in place across the Council and illustrates that our assurance framework is working well.
- 3.2 The findings bear witness to the effect that the Covid19 pandemic has had (and continues to have) on the Council over the last 12 months. Members will be aware that:
- To ensure individuals, businesses and communities were supported, work was re-prioritised to provide additional capacity where it was most required.
 - The Council has been involved in much additional work related to the pandemic including administering covid-related business support grants, test and trace, advising businesses on the requirement of providing covid-safe work premises following periods of lockdown, relaying key Government communications and appointing Covid Wardens to ensure that public safety measures are well communicated and adhered to.
 - The vast majority of officers reverted to home working arrangements.
 - Council meetings moved to virtual arrangements
 - Additional delegated decision-making powers were put in place.

- 3.3 The situation has been extremely fluid and fast-moving. Therefore, active risk management has been required. This has been demonstrated during the last 12 months as the Council has anticipated potential covid-related issues and put mitigations in place.
- 3.4 The findings of the report show that across the critical activities and emerging risks which were within the report's scope; 53% are assessed as performing well (green); 44% require some attention (amber) and 3% are in need of urgent attention (red). Reference is made below to those areas categorised as red in nature. The report contains full details on all areas under the scope of the exercise.
- Transactional Service - Gainsborough Market
 - Emerging Risk – 'Breathing Space' legislation
 - Key Project – Test & Trace
 - Strategic Risk - ICT Security and Information Governance arrangements
- 3.5 Last year's findings, using the same methodology, were green (72%), amber (25%) and red (3%).
- 3.6 However, in light of the situation within which the Council finds itself operating, this year's findings are positive and have been welcomed by the Council's Management Team.
- 3.7 The 'field-work' identified a number of emerging risks which were discussed with the Management Team. It was acknowledged that the identification of emerging risks on the part of Team Managers is an essential aspect of effective service management and this input was welcomed. Further details are set out in the report itself.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 The Council expects the pandemic to be an issue for the foreseeable future. Much uncertainty and risk lies ahead and this will continue to be the case, even when a recovery phase can begin.
- 4.2 Consequently, appraisal and review across all of the Council's critical activities will be on-going and adverse impacts will continue to be appraised and evaluated. The task of prioritising and providing support where best needed will continue, to ensure the most vulnerable continue to be supported and where needs are greatest, demands can be met.
- 4.3 This year's report will be used as a basis for learning and improvements and business planning.
- 4.4 The findings of the report will also be taken into consideration when forming Internal Audit's work plan for 2021/22 and the Council's Annual Governance Statement for 2020/21.

5 Recommendation

5.1 The Committee are asked to:

- a) Approve the report
- b) Be assured that over the last year (and in light of the pandemic), the findings demonstrate that the Council's governance framework is operating effectively