



Committee: Governance & Audit

Date: 13th March 2018

Subject: Combined Assurance Report 2017/18

Report by:

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Purpose / Summary:

To present the Council's Combined Assurance Report for 2017/18.

RECOMMENDATION(S): The Committee are asked to approve the report and be assured that the findings illustrate that the Council's governance framework is operating effectively.

IMPLICATIONS

Legal: None

Financial: FIN/143/18

Staffing: None

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights: None

Risk Assessment: None

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities: None

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

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 2018.

2 Combined Assurance Report

- 2.1 This is the fifth Combined Assurance Report undertaken at West Lindsey District Council. It provides a view on assurance systems and services for the year ending March 2018. The report is offered at 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 shows that across the critical activities which were within the report's scope; 71% were assessed as performing well (green), with the remainder assessed as requiring some form of attention to ensure significant issues do not arise. Last year's findings; using the same methodology, were green (55%); amber (39%) and red (6%). The improved position is due to areas assessed as amber last year now being assessed as performing well and a reduction in the number of emerging risks, which are all categorised as 'amber' in nature.
- 3.3 The 'field-work' identified a number of potential emerging risks which were discussed with the Management Team. Following deliberations a significant proportion of these were considered as operational in nature and deemed to be manageable at that level.

- 3.4 Those transactional, front-facing activities, categorised as ‘amber’ in nature in this year’s report are set out below with the reasons for their amber ratings. In all cases the issues identified were known to the Council and oversight/actions were already in situ:

Area	Reason for Rating
Environmental Protection	New team manager is looking to review and improve processes
External Health & Safety	New team manager in place who is reviewing the service
Gainsborough Markets	Looking for effective solutions to halt long-term decline in markets
Health & Wellbeing	Contract awarded to WLDC to provide service. Capacity and impact on workloads to be assessed and monitored
Vulnerable Communities	Must ensure a clear strategy is in place to provide appropriate support when required
Planning Enforcement	Review of key policies required. Actions recommended in recent audit to be progressed
Community Safety/ASB	Recently re-structured. Audit due to look into service more closely
Operational/Strategic Property & Estate Management	Restructure and additional capacity now in place. Close working with Growth now evident. New processes to be embedded
Property Investment Portfolio	Purchase of investment properties is behind schedule. Governance processes are in place to support decision making
Building Control	Under new management; reviewing commercial opportunities

- 3.5 The content of the report and the thoughts of the Council’s senior management have identified a number of key areas of focus for the year ahead. These are:

- **Review of Statutory Returns**

The Council is required to submit to various government bodies, a wide range of statistical and performance related information in the form of statutory returns. These are provided across a range of Council activity. There is no clear corporate oversight of their submission, their usefulness and accuracy. Hence a piece of work is in development to delve further into this.

- **Oversight of Third Party Arrangements**

The Council is involved in a number of joint venture arrangements and is also a joint shareholder in two companies. It is key that the Council’s governance arrangements incorporate appropriate oversight and scrutiny of the business plans and operations of these bodies to ensure

they are performing well and their values are compatible with those of the Council.

- **Enforcement Related Services**

A restructure of this area and recruitment to provide additional capacity have been completed within the past 12 months. The effectiveness of the new arrangements has to remain in focus to provide assurance that the anticipated improvements in service delivery are realised.

- **Implementation of the Wellbeing Service**

Following a procurement and tendering exercise, the Council has been successful in being chosen to deliver a strand of the service to support vulnerable adults to maintain their independence and wellbeing, therefore preventing the escalation of need and reducing demand on Hospital and Adult Social Care. This service commences on 1st April 2018. The Council must ensure its implementation is closely monitored, partnership working arrangements are effective and the intended outcomes for users of the service are achieved.

3.6 Operating in an environment of constant change and uncertainty, service areas assess and monitor any emerging risks that may affect the delivery of their service. These have been captured within the report and all have been classified as medium (amber) in nature. These classifications have been fed into the overall green and amber ratings contained within the report. In comparison to last year's report, there has been a significant reduction on the number of emerging risks

3.7 The identification and management of risk are regarded as key disciplines. We are pleased that an appreciation and awareness of risk management was evident and captured during the collation of the report.

4 Next Steps

4.1 The report will be used as a basis for learning and improvements and service planning and will be updated to provide an overall level of assurance, focusing on the critical areas (detailed at 3.5 above) for the Council in achieving strategic objectives for the 2018/19 period.

4.2 The findings of the report will be used to inform Internal Audit's work plan for 2018/19 and the Council's Annual Governance Statement for 2017/18.

5 Recommendation

5.1 The Committee are asked to approve the report and be assured that the findings illustrate that the Council's governance framework is operating effectively.