

Annual Governance Statement

Scope of Responsibility

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiency and effectively.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council also has a duty under Local Government (Best Value) Act (Northern Ireland) 2002 to make arrangements for continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

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

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council has prepared an Annual Governance Statement which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government. This statement explains how Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council meets the requirements of Regulation 4 of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland 2015) in relation to the publication of a statement on internal control.

The Purpose of the Governance Framework

Council's governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

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 has been in place for the year ended 31 March 2022 and up to the date of approval of the financial statements.

The Governance Framework

The key elements of the systems and processes that comprise the Council's governance arrangements include the following:

1. Identifying and communicating the Council's vision of its purpose and intended outcomes for citizens and service users.

The Council adopted a new Corporate Strategy for 2021 to 2025 in February 2021.

This Corporate Strategy was developed following a consultation process involving Councillors and senior managers within Council although the process was significantly delayed due to the pandemic. Council staff were asked for their comments on the new Strategy document via the Staff Newsletter. Further effective public consultation, however, proved difficult due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic but a copy of the

new Corporate Strategy has been placed on the Council website with the Council welcoming any comments on it from the public. A hard copy of the Council Strategy will not be published at this time.

The new Corporate Strategy sets out the Council's Vision for the Borough, its Mission Statement and priority Strategic Themes. The Council has identified five priority strategic themes as follows:

- Cohesive Leadership
- Local Economy
- Improvement and Innovation
- Healthy, Active and Engaged Communities
- Climate Change and Our Environment

Outcomes and indicators have been developed under each priority theme and these will provide a framework for decision and investments across the timeframe of the Corporate Strategy. However, the delay in the development of the new Corporate Strategy caused by the impact of the pandemic enabled Council to identify and factor into the new Strategy the challenges and impacts on the Council and our Borough of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result it is recognized that the Strategy should be seen as a "living" document and be reviewed on a regular basis (at least annually). It must evolve to meet the emerging understanding and context created by the impacts of Covid-19 in our area.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council was tasked by the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 to lead, maintain and facilitate the community planning process in Causeway Coast and Glens. It worked with its Statutory Partners to develop the Causeway Coast and Glens Community Plan and the Community Plan was formally signed off by the Community Planning Strategic Partnership in April 2017 (formally launched in June 2017).

Ten Councillors were nominated to participate on behalf of Council on the Strategic Partnership and they have been closely involved in the work of the Community Planning Partnership.

The development of the Community Plan involved a detailed statistical analysis of the Causeway Coast and Glens area; an extensive community engagement/consultation exercise; the establishment of thematic working groups to develop population outcomes and indicators; with mutual agreement by the members of the Community Planning Strategic Partnership of the final version of the Plan.

The next stage in the process of community planning involved taking the outcomes identified within the Plan and developing a Delivery Plan, which identified actions necessary to achieve the Population Outcomes in the Plan. This work commenced in June 2017 and was finalised in June 2018 with the launch of the Delivery Plan for the Community Plan.

This Delivery Plan identified 44 practical collaborative actions to take forward the high level outcomes identified in the Community Plan itself. The Delivery Plan was based on the work of a number of Delivery Design Groups which included representatives from the statutory partners along with a range of support partners from other appropriate organisations.

A review of the Delivery Plan was undertaken in 2020 and, although this was challenging due to the pandemic, a full review was completed and a revised Delivery Plan with 34 actions was adopted by the Community Planning Partnership in December 2020.

The community planning process also involved the implementation of a monitoring and reporting process overseen by the Strategic Partnership and this commenced in June 2018. Each Action Lead identified in the Delivery Plan was required to complete a report card outlining progress on their action. This reporting process

takes place on a quarterly basis with summarised reports on progress submitted and considered by the Strategic Community Planning Partnership at their quarterly meetings.

The legislation also requires the publication of a Statement of Progress every two years from the publication of the Community Plan. Causeway Coast and Glens first Statement of Progress was published in November 2019 and, on the whole, was able to demonstrate positive changes within the Borough. The second Statement of Progress was published in November 2021.

The Strategic Partnership are now in the process of undertaking a review of the Community Plan Strategic Framework as well as again reviewing the Delivery Plan to assess and meet the challenges of Covid-19 and the current cost of living impacts.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council has commenced work on a new Local Development Plan (LDP) for the Borough. The LDP is the spatial reflection of the Community Plan and provides an opportunity to develop a new planning framework specific to Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area, balancing the development needs of the Borough with the protection of our built and natural assets.

Following publication of the LDP: Preferred Options Paper (POP) in June 2018 for comment, during 2019/20 the Planning Department analysed the representations received and commenced the drafting of strategic planning policies to be published in the LDP: Draft Plan Strategy.

Towards the end of the 2019/20 and throughout 2020/21 reporting period Government/Public Health Agency (PHA) advice in relation to the Covid-19 outbreak resulted in the postponement of planned LDP Consultee and Stakeholder Meetings and Member Workshops. However, this work has resumed during the end of Q2 of 2021/22 reporting period. As a result of the delays an updated Timetable has been agreed with the Planning Appeals Commission and the DfI. In addition, due to the implications of the Covid restrictions, the Statement of Community Involvement has been updated and agreed with DfI to reflect changes to availability of documents. Public Consultation on the Draft Plan Strategy will be undertaken in line with the Council's published LDP Timetable and any future Government/PHA advice.

During 2021/22 work continued on research and analysis of evidence. Topic-based papers have been circulated to internal and external stakeholders for comment. Draft policies for the LDP Draft Plan Strategy have been presented to Members at workshops for input and discussion and only one workshop remains to be held. The Planning Steering Group met in January 2022 and agreed the first set of draft policies. Sustainability Appraisal days took place in March 2022 in relation to this first batch of policies. To date the LDP Draft Plan Strategy continues to progress.

2. Reviewing the Council's vision and its implications for the Council's governance arrangements.

The vision of the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council over the 2021-2025 timeframe is:

“We will maximize the benefits of our unique location and landscape by providing accessible, efficient and sustainable services fulfilling local and visitor expectations.”

The mission of the Council for 2021-2025 is to:

“Improve the quality of life and well-being for all of our citizens and visitors by:

- Providing effective, accessible and sustainable local public services.
- Improving economic prosperity.
- Ensuring local communities at the heart of decision making.
- Protecting, promoting and enhancing our unique natural environment and assets
- Advocating for the area and our citizens in both local and international arenas.

The Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council will deliver its services and meet its responsibilities to ratepayers and communities across the Council area by adhering to the following values: Fairness, Excellence, Sustainability, Empowerment and Improvement.

The strategic themes identified in the Council's Corporate Strategy for 2021-25 were designed to ensure the vision is realised, with each objective having a series of sub-objectives.

The strategic priority themes are as follows:-

- Cohesive Leadership
- Local Economy
- Improvement and Innovation
- Healthy, Active and Engaged Communities
- Climate Change and Our Environment.

All reports presented to Council identify the Strategic Theme, ensuring alignment with Council objectives. A template has been developed for Committee and Council reports which clearly identifies the linkage to the Council Strategy with officers required to identify the Strategic Theme and Outcome the subject of the report will contribute to.

The corporate risk register identifies the factors which could prevent achievement of these objectives and each risk is assigned to a member of the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT). The Corporate Risk Register is updated by SLT and presented to Audit Committee on a quarterly basis.

3. Measuring the quality of services for users through the Citizen Satisfaction Survey, for ensuring they are delivered in accordance with the Council's objectives and for ensuring that they represent the best use of resources.

Council is committed to providing quality services aligned to its strategic objectives and has commenced developing business plans for all key services.

The business plan template requires officers to identify relevant actions under each Strategic Theme and related Outcome. These actions are supported by key performance indicators, timescales, lead officers, identification of internal and external partners and how the action links to the Council's Performance Plan.

Council continue to monitor, review and take corrective action as necessary in striving to achieve maximum satisfaction with council services, within the allocated resources.

During the year Council considered all available information in deciding how best to deliver the services within the area.

Council revised its Comments, Complaints and Compliments Policy in 2018 to include a process to deal with complaints made against the Chief Executive. A copy of the revised policy is available on Council's website.

As part of the Corporate Performance Improvement Plan for 2019/20 Council committed to the following Improvement Objective: "We will introduce a robust arrangement for engaging with our citizens."

The citizen survey was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In June 2021, through the 2021/22 Performance Improvement Plan, Council began to work on an Improvement Objective to increase our levels of engagement with citizens. Primary amongst this was the development, rollout, and completion of CCG's first Citizen's Survey. We set an ambitious target of 2,000 responses as well as committing to report back to Council with results and outcomes before the end of March 2022.

The Citizen's Survey was opened on 24th November 2021 and then closed on 7th January 2022. An invitation leaflet to take part was delivered to every domestic address in the Borough. A promotional video was developed and issued through Council's social media channels and local press and media were also utilised.

Council have received 2,268 responses in total, with an excellent completion rate of 82%. For a population the size of Causeway Coast and Glens, this is a statistically significant number, which means that we can have a

high degree of confidence (95%) that the views expressed will be in line with those of the population as a whole.

870 respondents took the opportunity to provide further comments on any aspects of the Councils performance. This has provided an additional wealth of information and valuable qualitative data. The areas mentioned the most in the additional comments were Council facilities, recycling, litter, car parking and swimming.

4. Defining and documenting the roles and responsibilities of the executive, non-executive, scrutiny and officer functions, with clear delegation arrangements and protocols for effective communication.

The roles and responsibilities of the Members of Council are defined by the Northern Ireland Code of Local Government Conduct, which is now mandatory, effective from 28th May 2014.

Training continues to be delivered to all members, as soon as they come into office.

Roles and responsibilities of Senior Officers are defined by job description, job specification, and terms and conditions of employment. Formal staff appraisals are currently in place for Senior Leadership Team (SLT), and this process is currently being developed in line with Leadership and Development Management Programme.

All internal policies and procedures are available on Council's staff net for information, and are also included as part of the induction process for all new employees.

All Directors report to Council on a monthly basis, on areas of responsibility, and ensure Council are kept informed of progress within each service area.

In terms of decision making, all decisions taken by Committee are ratified by full council, with the exception of Planning Committee which has full council powers. There are 6 committees of Council and the meeting schedule is as follows:

- Tuesday Week 1 – Council Meeting
- Tuesday Week 2 – Environmental Services Committee
- Thursday Week 2 – Finance Committee
- Tuesday Week 3 – Leisure and Development Committee
- Tuesday Week 4 – Corporate Policy and Resources Committee
- Wednesday Week 4 – Planning Meeting
- Quarterly – Audit Committee

Scrutiny is provided by the Audit Committee, Internal Audit (co-sourcing arrangement) and the Local Government Auditor.

There are also a number of Sub-Committees and working groups which have either Terms of Reference agreed by Council, or are tasked with a particular project.

Council currently communicates with wider stakeholders through various engagement processes, meetings, Council Website, Social Media and through press and media releases. Internal communication systems include Councils intranet, Staff newsletter, email, written correspondence, working group minutes and a mixture of formal and informal team meetings.

Council developed a Citizens Newsletter in 2017/18 and this continued to be produced and circulated to all households in the Borough during 2021/2022-

5. Developing, communicating and embedding codes of conduct, defining the standards of behaviour for members and staff.

Codes of Conduct of Members

The Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors came into force on 28th May 2014. All members have been trained on the code, with training provided to new and co-opted members as soon as possible.

A Register of Interests is maintained and updated on an annual basis, or as and when required. In terms of travel and subsistence claims, Councillors are required to complete a claim form (submitted with receipts as appropriate) and sign a declaration regarding their claim.

Council adopted a Gifts and Hospitality Policy for Elected Members and Employees in March 2022 which has been circulated to all Members and Employees and annual reminders will be issued. A register of gifts and hospitality is maintained by the Democratic Services Department and this is updated when relevant information is provided by a member of staff and elected members.

Codes of Conduct for Officers

Council has adopted the revised "Code of Conduct for Local Government Officers", issued by the Local Government Staff Commission as a statutory recommendation for adoption by all councils and promulgated under the authority of the Local Government Staff Commission under Section 40(4) (f) of the Local Government Act (NI) 1972.

The Code of Conduct is signed by employees on appointment and is covered as part of the Induction process for new employees.

During the 2021/22 year 280 employees received training in the revised Code. In 2022/23 face to face training for all front-line staff in operational areas will be delivered, following the relaxation of Covid restrictions.

When new employees commence employment with the Council the Code of Conduct is sent out with their Main Statement of Terms and Conditions. Employees are asked to confirm, in writing, that they have received and read a copy of the Code. Job Descriptions within Council also require employees as part of their duties and responsibilities to adhere to the Code of Conduct for Local Government Officers.

Officers are given a copy of the Code on taking up appointment and failure to adhere to it is a disciplinary offence. Officers are also issued with terms and conditions of employment on commencing employment with the Council, and would be advised of various policies and procedures on induction. Existing members of staff have access to these documents on the Staff Portal. New policies and procedures are brought to the attention of staff and are also available via the Staff Portal.

The induction process for all new staff includes a copy of specific policies on staff conduct, including travelling and subsistence expenses, disciplinary and grievance policies and procedures, absence and sickness reporting, Data Protection, Freedom of Information, Equality and Good Relations and Health and Safety at Work.

Other supplementary codes of practice relating to the conduct expected of employees are available to staff via the Staff Portal.

Council adopted a Gifts and Hospitality Policy for Elected Members and Employees in March 2022 which has been circulated to all Members and Employees and annual reminders A register of gifts and hospitality is maintained by the Democratic Services Department and this is updated when relevant information is provided by a member of staff and elected members.

6. Reviewing and updating standing orders, standing financial instructions, a scheme of delegation and supporting procedure notes/manuals, which clearly define how decisions are taken and the processes and controls required managing risks.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council operates a system of standing orders for the regulation of the proceedings of the Council and Council business. Standing Orders were revised twice during 2021/2022 which resulted in two amendments being made. Council also adopted the revised scheme of allowances for members during the year.

The Standing Orders are included within the Council's Constitution. A Council is required, under section 2 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, to prepare and keep up to date a Constitution. Causeway Coast

and Glens Borough Council adopted a new Constitution on 22nd September 2015. This Constitution governs how the Council operates, how decisions are made, and the procedures which are to be followed to ensure efficiency, transparency and accountability to local people. Some of these processes are required by the law, while others are a matter for the Council to choose. This is updated as and when required, following the revision of Standing Orders and the Scheme of Allowances. The Scheme of Delegation was approved by Council in November 2020, and the Council Constitution was also updated in January 2022.

The Constitution is divided into sixteen Articles which set out the basic rules governing the Council's business. More detailed procedures and codes of practice are provided in separate Rules and Protocols within the document.

The Scheme of Delegation for Development Management, Development Plan, Enforcement and Other Planning Functions and the Protocol for the Operation of the Planning Committee took effect from 1st April 2015 on the transfer of Planning functions to local government.

The Scheme of Delegation and the Protocol were reviewed during 2021/22. The Scheme of Delegation for the Planning Department was reviewed by the Planning Committee and agreed by Dfl and implemented on 05 July 2021. The Protocol for the Operation of the Planning Committee was reviewed by the Planning Committee and implemented on 23 February 2022.

A financial policy manual was approved by Council in June 2020. Detailed policies and procedures in relation to Purchasing and Procurement including expenditure limits and authorisation signatures are in place, reviewed periodically and updated as required. A revised Procurement Policy was approved by Council in March 2021, the main outcome being the retention of the lower expenditure limit requiring Council approval at £10,000.

Council has a Risk Management Strategy, which requires the identification of Corporate and Departmental Risks, the assessment of impact and likelihood of those risks and the mitigating controls in place. Council has Corporate and Departmental risk registers in place, and these are reviewed regularly. The Corporate Risk Register is reviewed by SLT and presented to the Audit Committee quarterly. The current Information Risk Management Policy was agreed by Audit Committee in September 2018.

An initial Treasury Management Strategy Statement was approved by Council in December 2014. The policy was developed in the context of the Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 and the local Government (Capital Finance and Accounting) Regulations (NI) 2011 and includes the key principles of CIPFA's Treasury Management in the Public Sector Code of Practice and taking guidance from Council's Treasury Management Advisers. A revised Treasury Management Strategy is approved by Council annually, the statement for 2021/2022 being presented at Finance Committee in June 2021. The Annual Treasury Management Strategy statement sets out the expected treasury management operations for the year.

7. Undertaking the core functions of an Audit Committee, as identified in CIPFA's Audit Committees - Practical Guidance for Local Authorities.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council operate a committee system, with the Audit Committee meeting once per quarter.

Representation on the Audit Committee is based on the d'hondt system, with 16 elected members, representative of each political party grouping in Council, and 1 Independent Advisor. All meetings are attended by the Director of Corporate Services, Internal Auditor (In-house) relevant Council officers, along with the contracted Internal Auditor (Co-sourcing Partner currently Moore NI). The Audit Committee Terms of Reference have been documented and approved by Council. These were reviewed and agreed in December 2021, to ensure compliance with CIPFA best practice. The Terms of Reference set out the scope of the Committee in relation to Audit Activity, Regulatory Framework and Accounts.

The Audit Committee met on four occasions between April 2021 and March 2022, this included Internal Auditors and the NIAO representation (An open invitation is extended to the Northern Ireland Audit Office to attend all meetings). Following each meeting, minutes are circulated and approved by Council.

The internal audit function for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is provided by both in-house Internal Auditor and by Moore NI through an Internal Audit co-sourcing arrangement.

Various aspects of operating activities were sampled and examined to ensure the appropriate legislation, policies and procedures were adhered to and expenditure was lawful. Internal audit reports include award of assurance levels and recommendations for improvement. These audit reports are presented to the Audit Committee throughout the year. The Internal Audit Service operates to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards 2013.

8. Ensuring compliance with relevant laws and regulations, internal policies and procedures, and that expenditure is lawful.

The Legal Services Department in Causeway Coast and Glens currently consists of three full time solicitors, and a paralegal. Derry City and Strabane District Council Legal Services Department is retained to assist with prosecutions and advice. The land and property solicitor is currently engaged in working through the Councils legal title to its property and in registering the Councils unregistered land as well as dealing with all land and property matters.

There remains the requirement for specialist legal advice on occasion in relation to corporate issues and human resources advice and Planning.

Internal policies and procedures are updated and renewed as and when required to reflect legislative changes and agreed recommendations by both Internal and External Auditors and are circulated to the relevant staff when reviewed. Internal Policies and Procedures would also be available on the Staff Intranet.

In terms of lawful expenditure, workshops and special council meetings are held to discuss the proposals for the Estimates for the forthcoming year. This covers both Capital and Revenue Expenditure. Internal audit and Local Government Annual reports (including statutory audit) are also examined and discussed at these meetings, as well as the meetings of the Audit Committee. Council are issued with a summary report which forms the basis for discussion and decision making at the meetings.

A standard report template is used for all committee reports, which includes a section to report on cost implications.

As previously mentioned, Council appointed Moore NI as part of a co-sourcing internal audit arrangement. The Internal Audit plan covers a range of Council's main activities, financial and otherwise. Various aspects of operating activities have been sampled and examined to ensure that appropriate legislation, policies and procedures are adhered to and expenditure is lawful. Internal audit reports including award of assurance levels and recommendations for improvement are reported to both Council and the Audit Committee.

In terms of service specific compliance, service departments are kept up to date in the following ways

- In house legal services
- Subscription to on line expertise e.g. HR - Legal-Island Email Service and Croners On-line Employment Law Information Service and Advice Line.
- Legal Advice when required - Council subscribe to DAS – Employment Advice as part of the annual Insurance programme.
- Officer Meetings – Service specific
- Various Forum
- Training and Development

The Chief Executive is also the Council's Chief Financial Officer, as required by Section 1, of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. The Chief Financial Officer is charged with ensuring the lawfulness and financial prudence of decision making, providing advice, and guidance and ensuring that expenditure is incurred lawfully.

The financial management arrangements conform with the governance requirements of CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010) as set out in the Application Note to Delivering

Good Governance in Local Government Framework. The CFO is also supported by suitably qualified and experienced staff (including qualified accountants) within the finance function to ensure that decisions made by the CFO are based on sound technical knowledge and understanding.

9. Whistle-blowing and other processes for receiving and investigating complaints from the public.

Council has a Raising Concerns Policy and an Anti-fraud Bribery and Corruption Policy. The Whistle-blowing policy was reviewed and updated in line with Raising Concerns good practice guide for the Northern Ireland public sector issued by the Northern Ireland Audit Office and was ratified at full Council on 5th January 2021. The Anti-Fraud Bribery and Corruption Policy was approved by Council in July 2015 and was reviewed by Audit Committee in December 2021, and approved by Council in January 2022.

All staff are informed of the policies and copies are included in the Staff Induction Pack and available on the Staff Intranet. Raising Concerns/Whistle-blowing is a standing item at the quarterly Audit Committee meetings.

Council also operates a formal scheme for public complaints and suggestions. These are referred to the relevant department and responded to within set deadlines, with the opportunity to have complaints referred to a higher level in the organisation where the complainant is not satisfied with the response. Where a complainant remains dissatisfied he/she is advised to contact the Northern Ireland Ombudsman.

There were three notifications of concerns received and followed up by Internal Audit during the year all of which have been reported to the Audit Committee.

10. Identifying the development needs of Members and senior officers in relation to their strategic roles, supported by appropriate training.

Council has a limited training and development budget for both Members and Staff.

All relevant conferences and courses are circulated to Councillors at Council meetings. An Elected Members' Conference Attendance Policy was agreed by Council on 23rd February 2016.

Each Councillor has an allocated amount of money set aside for conferences and courses and capacity building. This covers course fees, travel and subsistence. This is monitored on a monthly basis to ensure the budget is not exceeded. This may include further education leading to a recognised qualification.

Council agreed an action plan for Elected Member Development in February 2020 Council is working towards NI Charter for Elected Member Development and will be assessed in November 2022. A training needs analysis was carried out for Elected Members in March 2021 and a programme of training will be developed for consideration by the Elected Member Development Steering Group. The programme of training will continue to be reviewed and further training arranged.

Alongside the Elected Member Development a Leadership and Management Development framework has been developed for Senior Officers. In addition a range of Strategic Learning and Development Priorities have been identified and learning is delivered and budgets allocated in accordance with these priorities. They are, Role Related training, Mandatory Training, Leadership & Management Development, Team Development & Core Skills, Assistance to Study (Further Education) and Other.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council are progressing on a consistent and coordinated approach to learning and development.

11. Establishing clear channels of communication with all sections of the community and other stakeholders, ensuring accountability and encouraging open consultation.

Council consults with various bodies in relation to important strategic or policy development matters. Provisions are in place for communication in various formats and languages if requested.

Council has communicated with citizens and stakeholders by utilising the following methods:-

A Citizens Survey has been developed in conjunction with APSE Performance Networks and this will be used to consult with Citizens in relation to the performance of the Council and to identify improvements across Council services. The Citizen's Survey was opened on 24th November 2021 and then closed on 7th January 2022. Council have received 2,268 responses in total, with an excellent completion rate of 82%. For a population the size of Causeway Coast and Glens, this is a statistically significant number, which means that we can have a high degree of confidence (95%) that the views expressed will be in line with those of the population as a whole. As part of the survey response, 870 respondents took the opportunity to provide further comments on any aspects of the Council's performance.

Community Planning Sessions – Strategic and Local, Establishment of Thematic Working Groups, Community Information events and Public Meetings, Statutory Partner Engagement, Citizen Surveys, Council Strategy, Website and Social Media, Council and Committee Meetings, Improved access to agenda, reports and minutes via website, Press Releases and Public Advertisements, Leaflets and Publications – including e-zine, and the annual publication of the Citizens' Newsletter.

Council and committee meetings are open to the press and members of the public, and minutes are published on the Council's website and made available at the Council Offices.

Council also received and responded to 633 Requests for Access to Information during 2021/22.

Review of Effectiveness

The Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the Senior Managers within Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Internal Audit's Annual Report, and also by comments made by the external auditors.

The Audit Committee includes elected member representatives of the political membership of Council and an Independent Member. Under the terms of reference for the Audit Committee, they are charged with responsibility for ensuring good stewardship of the Council's resources, and committed to making the Council, its working groups and departments more responsive to the audit function.

The Internal Auditor provides an independent opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control system. The Internal Auditor forwards draft reports to the relevant Director/Head of Service, for Management comments, and responses. The reports are co-ordinated by the Internal Auditor and then issued in their final format, presented to the Audit Committee initially and then to Council.

The Chief Executive has responsibility for preparing the Annual Governance Statement. In preparing this statement, he has considered the governance framework and system of internal controls in place. The Chief Executive leads the Council's SLT to collectively have involvement in and oversight of the processes involved in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework. In producing this statement, full regard has been made to the register of interest for both Councillors and employees, reports of the internal and external auditor and the Corporate Risk Register.

The following process has been applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework:

- **The Authority** - a committee structure was in place within Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council during 2020/21. A Finance Committee was added to the structure during 2019/20 to enhance the review and scrutiny of Council finances.
- **The Executive** – Service and Corporate Risk Registers, Operational Policies and Procedures, Regular Management Meetings and Communication, Internal and External Audit reports, Administrative procedures (including segregation of duties) and Management Supervision.
- **The Audit Committee** – The audit committee is a standing committee of Council, meeting quarterly, with 16 elected members and 1 independent member. All meetings attended by the Director of Corporate Services, relevant officers, Internal Audit and External Audit.

The review of the effectiveness of the Audit, Risk and Governance of the Council is also informed by the Annual Internal Audit Opinion for the year.

The Audit, Risk & Governance Manager, in line with PSIAS, is required to provide an opinion as to the adequacy and effectiveness of the governance, risk management and control environment. In giving this opinion, it should be noted that assurance can never be absolute.

Internal Audit can provide a **satisfactory** level of assurance as to adequacy and effectiveness of the governance, risk management and control environment. Overall, there is a satisfactory system of governance, risk management and control. While there may be some residual risk identified this should not significantly impact on the achievement of system objectives.

Specifically, my opinion is based on the following:

- The completion of audits in the 2021/22 audit plan, advisory work undertaken and annual assurance statements from the senior leadership team on compliance with risk management and internal control systems.
- Internal Audit has performed follow up reviews in areas that received a limited level of assurance in previous years including the management of Agency staff and Council corporate credit card procedures.
- Management have improved in relation to the consideration and implementation of prior year recommendations and progress has been made in addressing the more significant recommendations highlighted by Internal Audit and subsequent progress tracking.
- Evidence set out in the review of the Directors Assurance Statements regarding the assurances and processes used by directors to determine their sign off procedures.
- The effects of any significant changes in the organisation's risk profile, objectives or systems and the requirement for Internal Audit involvement.
- Reviewed and considered matters arising from reports to the Council committees.

The opinion given is satisfactory, however there are a number of recommendations currently progressing that have been identified through internal audit work. Three internal audits in the 2021/22 received a limited assurance rating being Estates & Facilities Servicing, Legal Services, and Risk Management. Control issues brought forward from prior years and continue to be identified during internal audit work include:

- The significance and number of financial risks both internal and external to the Council, if not carefully managed could result in a risk of governance issues for Council. Internal audit identified issues to be addressed in relation to budget management, the implementation of the medium-term financial strategy, breaches of legislation and management override of controls in place for the Council. Timing and accuracy of financial information continue to raise concern.
- Recommendations in relation to the Business Continuity Planning are continuing to progress.

● **Other explicit review/assurance mechanisms -**

Health and Safety: Reviews of Health and Safety by professional qualified officers, the Corporate Health and Safety Committee, and various Health and Safety sub committees.

External funding: throughout the year is subject to independent audits from relevant funders i.e. Europe, Government Departments, SEUPB etc.

Local Government Auditor: work carried out by the Local Government Auditor during 2021/22 is also used by the Council as an additional assurance mechanism.

The Chief Executive has been advised on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by the Audit Committee and a plan to address weaknesses and ensure continuous improvement of the systems is in place.

The Role of the Chief Financial Officer

The Chief Financial Officer is also the Chief Executive and as such is the key member of the Leadership Team, helping it to develop and implement strategy and to resource and deliver the Council's strategic objectives sustainably and in the public interest.

The Chief Financial Officer is actively involved in, and able to bring influence to bear on, all material business decisions to ensure immediate and longer term implications, opportunities and risks are fully considered, and aligned with the authority's financial strategy.

He leads the promotion and delivery of good financial management so that public money is safeguarded at all times and used appropriately, economically, efficiently and effectively.

Specifically he leads and directs the finance function, and is supported, in so doing, by professionally qualified and suitably experienced staff embedded within the Finance Department.

The Council is satisfied that appropriate financial management arrangements are in place in order to conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010) as set out in the Application Note to "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: A Framework".

Significant Governance Issues in 2020/21 – update

4 governance issues were reported in 2021, 3 have rolled forward into 2021/22.

In terms of Planning, during 2021/22 the actions from the Planning Review have been progressed and a Planning Review Steering Group established to oversee the implementation of the recommendations from the Report. Performance in delivering timely decisions has improved with provisional published statistics for the period Q1-Q3 of 2021/22 confirming substantial improvement in the average processing time for major planning applications with average processing times faster than the Northern Ireland average.

Significant Governance Issues in 2021/22

In addition to those areas, noted by Internal Audit above, the following governance issues have been identified:

1. Finance

Finance continues to be listed as a key corporate risk on the corporate risk register. The Northern Ireland Audit Office's audit strategy identifies Financial Resilience as a presumed risk factor for 2021/22. Council continue to face a range of budget pressures including inflation, energy and utility cost pressures affecting front line services and increases in wages and pension contributions. Council will continue to seek ways to maximize available cost savings and increase income generation opportunities.

The Draft Medium Term Financial Plan is currently progressing, and it is envisaged this will be finalized in Autumn 2022.

In addition to the general fund, Council have established a number of reserves, including a Covid Recovery Reserve, a financial recovery Reserve, Reorganisation Reserve and a Repair and Renewal Fund.

A new finance system is planned to be operational in the coming months, which will streamline operational processes and generate real time reports.

2. Digital and Cyber

Council recognize the Digital and Cyber risk in the current environment. Council takes the security of users' data and infrastructure very seriously. Council are committed to providing an environment that is safe, secure, and available to all users. SSL certificates are used to encrypt data between the user and the server along with industry-standard software to protect against malicious attacks, as well as virus scanning. Developer access to the server is restricted to a limited set of IPs. The server hosting location has 24/7 manned presence and controlled access with trained professionals accompanying authorised visitors on site. There is comprehensive fully alarmed CCTV surveillance, which operates on a 24/7 basis. A mandatory comprehensive Cyber security awareness training programme has been rolled out to all staff.

3. Compliance/Regulation

Procurement has been identified in the NIAO 2021/22 audit strategy as a presumed risk. The Report to Those Charged with Governance 2020/21 also identified Procurement as a Priority 1. During the year, Council engaged external expertise to provide assistance and guidance in relation to procurement exercises. Council will continue to monitor progress to ensure compliance with prior year recommendations.

A Data Protection Officer was employed during the year.

The Minister for Communities directed NIAO to undertake an extraordinary audit of the accounts of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council concentrating on land disposals and easements and related asset management policies and procedures. The Extraordinary Audit is ongoing at this time.

We propose over the coming year to take steps to continue to address recommendations and matters raised further enhance our compliance with governance and health and safety regulations. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

4. Recruitment and Retention of Staff

In the current economic climate there are challenges in terms of recruitment and retention of staff, coupled with the ongoing negotiations regarding terms and conditions, may lead to a number of positions unfilled which could have an impact on service delivery. To address these issues, Council have committed to entering into meaningful negotiation with the Trade Unions, seek to fill posts at the earliest opportunity. Council are rolling out a number of initiatives and development opportunities with the aim of retaining and developing existing staff, which assists with Business continuity and retention of Corporate memory.

Signed

Clerk and Chief Executive
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Date xx June 2022

Signed

Chair of the Council
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Date xx June 2022