

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

2020/21

**SERVICE DIRECTOR CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITIES
ASSURANCE STATEMENT ON INTERNAL CONTROL AND GOVERNANCE**

To: Chief Executive

- 1 I am aware of the requirement to review the effectiveness of existing internal control and governance arrangements on an annual basis and to publicise the Annual Governance Statement to reinforce good Corporate Governance practice, and as part of that process that the Executive/Service Directors sign an annual statement on the internal control and corporate governance arrangements in place in their directorates.
- 2 I can confirm that I have considered my area of responsibility to deliver the services and meet Council objectives and priorities. I have reviewed the risks associated with the achievement of those objectives, the performance management and compliance frameworks, and the roles, responsibilities and delegated powers of me as Service Director Customer & Communities to deliver the specific services.
- 3 The assurance I provide on the standard of governance arrangements relates to the seven core principles of good governance within the CIPFA/SOLACE 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' (the 'Framework' 2016 Edition), which the Council fully supports in its Local Code of Corporate Governance, namely:
 - A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law;
 - B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement;
 - C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits;
 - D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes;
 - E. Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it;
 - F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management; and
 - G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.
- 4 The assurance I provide also relates to my responsibilities set out with the Council's Financial Regulations for ensuring the security, custody and control of all resources including employees, plant and equipment, buildings and furnishings, materials, cash and stores appertaining to my area of responsibility including, where appropriate, but not limited to:
 - i. Financial Planning and Budgetary Control – Revenue and Capital
 - ii. Income
 - iii. Grant Applications and Claims
 - iv. Risk Management

- v. Prevention of Fraud, Theft or Corruption
- vi. Asset Management, and Security
- vii. Contracts and Procurement of Goods, Services & Works
- viii. Payment of Invoices
- ix. Salaries, Wages, Travel, Subsistence and Other Expenses
- x. Imprest Accounts
- xi. Private Property and Voluntary Funds
- xii. Trading Organisations

5 My opinion is based upon my knowledge of the extent of compliance with the seven core principles of Corporate Governance and Financial Regulations in my area of responsibility, the nature of findings and recommendations arising from relevant Internal Audit reviews and Management action taken to address the issues, and the findings and recommendations made by External Audit and other Inspection Agencies that relate to services provided by my Service Directorate either directly, or jointly through partnership working, or indirectly through contracting and procurement arrangements.

6 My opinion takes into account the changes associated with the Corporate Management Team structure in place from January 2020, including areas of responsibility that are new to me and the handover / transition arrangements that have been / are being undertaken.

7 This assurance statement also covers my responsibilities to comply with the regulatory requirements as laid out in Chapter 3 of the Scottish Housing Regulator's Regulatory Framework, to include:

- all relevant standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter in respect of any tenants, homeless persons, and other persons who are in receipt of housing services; and
- legal obligations associated with housing and homelessness services, equality and human rights, and tenant and resident safety.

I can confirm on-going competency of those Officers concerned with provision of advice and support on homelessness and other housing services relevant to the Council as a housing stock transfer authority and the adequacy of homelessness practices across the Council to ensure compliance with the Regulatory Framework. I would draw your attention to the following improvement actions, which are required to achieve full compliance with the Framework which I have considered when preparing the assurance I am required to give:

- Gypsy/Traveller site – The Council's designated site for Gypsy/Travellers within Scottish Borders at Tweedside Caravan Park, Innerleithen does not yet meet the Scottish Government's minimum standards for Gypsy/Traveller sites. The Council is continuing to engage with Tweedside Caravan Park and with the Scottish Housing Regulator in order to ensure that the standards are met.
- Homelessness Services - Largely satisfactory risk, control, and governance systems are in place. There is, however, some scope for improvement as current arrangements could undermine the achievement of objectives. A 'Self-Assessment and Service Improvement Action Plan' is in place which is currently being reviewed and updated by officers in light of COVID-19 impacts.

Although there are a few areas of work to be completed for full compliance with the Scottish Housing Regulator's revised Regulatory Framework, the overall arrangements in respect of landlord services provided by the Council are operating satisfactorily.

More information is contained in Appendix 1 'Summary Statement of Self-Assessment of Compliance against Regulatory Framework'.

A version of the Annual Assurance Statement for submission to the Scottish Housing Regulator is attached as Appendix 2 'Scottish Borders Council Annual Assurance Statement 2020/2021 to the Scottish Housing Regulator'. In order to meet Scottish Housing Regulator Requirements this document must be signed by the Chair of the Committee.

I confirm that I have seen and considered sufficient evidence to give me this assurance.

Apart from the above, I can confirm that internal control and governance arrangements in my Service Directorate are operating effectively.

Signed

Name Jenni Craig, Service Director Customer & Communities

Date 27 April 2021