

Annual Governance Statement

for Norfolk County Council

2021-22

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 (as amended) require that:
- The Council must conduct a review at least once a year of the effectiveness of its system of internal control,
 - Findings of this review should be considered by the Council,
 - The Council must approve an Annual Governance Statement; and
 - The Annual Governance Statement must accompany the Statement of Accounts.

For Norfolk County Council (the Council) the Audit Committee undertakes these duties on behalf of the Council.

- 1.2. The Council has faced unprecedented challenges during the past two years; living with and responding to the pandemic, rising demand for its services and continuing financial challenges. The Covid-19 crisis affected all aspects of council service delivery, and its impact would be felt for many years by individuals, families, services and community groups with the most vulnerable being affected the most. The Council had stood by its partners to deliver services to vulnerable residents, schools, district councils, the Clinical Commissioning Group and the voluntary sector. The then Director of Public Health issued her [Annual Report](#), detailing the direct impacts of Covid-19 in Norfolk. The cost to the Council in savings not made and additional costs have been high. The challenge now is to design a sustainable funding model that does not overburden residents with cost of what the Council delivers for them. The Council needs to ensure it delivers the right services to the right level in an efficient and effective way. The strategy, [Better Together, for Norfolk 2021-2025](#), is a high level document, which makes clear our intent and represents the Council's strategic priorities. It has been underpinned by a Corporate Delivery Plan and aligned to our medium-term Financial Strategy.

- 1.3. In keeping this statement up to date, since March 2022, the key activities the Council is currently involved in are as follows:
- Levelling Up - Norfolk is one of nine counties invited to negotiate an early County Deal under the new published framework (see 1.6 for more information).
 - Strategic review – Reviewing the role and number of management layers and spans of control and identifying areas of duplication (see 1.7 for more information).
 - Integrated Care System – bringing together providers and commissioners of NHS services with local authorities and other partners to improve population health and care
 - 'Connecting Communities' in Adult Social Services.

- 1.4. Through our experience in responding to the Covid pandemic, our interaction with residents and partners, and analysis of the latest data, we know that our broad ambitions remain the same, but that we need a sharper focus on a specific set of critical priorities that will enable us to prioritise our activities. The strategy, however, isn't simply about responding to issues and threats, but also about identifying opportunities and anticipating change, to create a competitive advantage for Norfolk.
- 1.5. On 8 December 2022 the Council and the Government agreed, in principle, to transfer funding and powers to boost jobs, regeneration, housing and transport to Norfolk. Known as a County Deal, it includes a guaranteed £20 million per year investment for the next 30 years. Finalising a Deal would mean that, from 2024 onwards, the Council can do more to:
- Target funding and resources to Norfolk's own growth and infrastructure priorities
 - Attract and retain new and key businesses and sectors
 - Invest in the skills we know we need
 - Unlock housing and employment sites
 - Raise our profile nationally, enabling our voice to be heard by Government and help shape future policies
- A Public Consultation was completed in respect of the County Deal and this has been submitted to central government for their consideration. Full Council will now need to pass a resolution in December 2023 to change to a Directly Elected Leader governance model if the deal is to go ahead.
- 1.6. It's 10 years since our last organisational review and so much has changed since then. The Strategic Review that has been underway since in mid-2022 will give us a clear understanding of how our current structure is working and help us develop detailed proposals about being more efficient and effective going forward. We're facing serious financial challenges and need to make savings this year and, in the years, to come, so we have to make changes to how we deliver some services, and how we shape our teams. The review is also about ensuring we respond to challenges such as recruitment and retention through developing a refreshed Pay And Reward Strategy, supporting talent management and career development through implementing Career Families, as well as refreshing our approach to leadership behaviours. We want to agree on a collective approach across the whole Council, which we can continue to build on when the review is over, to ensure our success well into the future.
- 1.7. Since the end of the 2021-22, in October 2022 the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services and the Director of Governance informed the Head of Paid Services of their intention to leave the County Council in the new year. At the December 2022 Full Council, it was agreed that their posts will not be replaced on a like for like basis and their statutory responsibilities would be reallocated to other officers. The senior structure was considered by the Employment Committee in February 2023. The Council has, within its

current staff members, those with the capability and experience to fulfil the statutory responsibilities associated with our Section 151 (Finance) and Monitoring Officer roles.

- 1.8. Since the end of 2021-22, at the Annual General Meeting of the County Council on 9 May 2023, Conservative group leader Cllr Kay Mason Billig was voted in as the new council leader. She succeeds Andrew Proctor who stood down from the role due to ill health. Cllr Andrew Jamieson will be deputy leader as well as continue as cabinet member for finance. Full details of the Cabinet and Committee Chairs are reported in the minutes of the Annual General Meeting. It was confirmed, at that meeting, that in order to strengthen partnership arrangements with the NHS, Cabinet responsibilities for Public Health and Wellbeing will have a separate portfolio from 3 responsibilities for Adult Social Care. The Leader also confirmed that she intended to review the existing leadership model and take any decision that requires Council agreement to that body in due course. On 31st May 2023 the Employment Committee received a report on the Appointment of a Chief Executive Officer. The committee agreed to an appointment process being progressed to move to a Chief Executive Model. There were several Senior Officer changes since June 2023. Debbie Bartlett was appointed Interim Executive Director Adult Social Services on 5 June, replacing James Bullion. Tom McCabe was appointed Chief Executive Officer on 12 June. Graham Bygrave was appointed Executive Director of CES on 26 June, replacing Tom McCabe. Derryth Wright has taken on the role of Interim Director for People from August 2023.
- 1.9. As part of producing this statement, Executive Directors have completed and signed an Annual Positive Assurance Statement and completed a supporting departmental assurance table. Action plans were put in place where any strengthening may be required. These plans are being followed up and assurance, on completed actions, will be reported to the Audit and Governance Committee in September 2023. Data Protection is a topic which is being strengthened and Cyber Resilience is actively managed. The Council is alert to recent local authority Public Interest reports; the risks, consequences and any lessons that can be taken for sustaining and or further strengthening governance, if required to meet new challenges.
- 1.10. The Chief Internal Auditor reviews the effectiveness of the system of internal control throughout the year and reports annually to the Audit Committee. The Chief Internal Auditor reported to the Audit Committee in July 2022 that, in his opinion, the system of internal control, including the arrangements for the management of risk during 2021-22, was acceptable and therefore considered sound.
- 1.11. Grant Thornton has identified three key areas for all Councils to consider in its “Lessons from recent Public Interest Reports” 2021 report. Section five of this AGS explains how the Council demonstrates how these key areas are managed – these being:
 - The context of local government in a COVID-19 world (including financial stability)
 - Governance, scrutiny, and culture

- Council leadership.

2. Scope of responsibility

- 2.1 The Council is responsible for ensuring 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, efficiently, and effectively. The Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way it exercises its functions having regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness. In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.
- 2.2 The Council has approved and adopted a Code of Corporate Governance consistent with the principles of the Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (CIPFA/SOLACE, 2016). The Code was approved by the then Policy and Resources Committee on 26 March 2018 and updated in May 2019 for consequential changes due to the adoption of the Cabinet system and again, in February 2023, as the Constitution had been updated. If you require any further information regarding this statement please contact Mr Adrian Thompson, Assistant Director of Finance (Audit), Norfolk County Council, County Hall, Martineau Lane, NR1 2DW.
- 2.3 Through the application of the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2021-22, the Annual Governance Statement must include reference to controls where significant activities take place through a group entity. This includes Companies that the Council owns, or part owns.
- 2.4 This statement explains how the Council has complied with the Code of Corporate Governance and meets the requirements of regulation 4 of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 (as amended), in relation to the publication of an Annual Governance Statement.
- 2.5 The Council administers the Norfolk Pension Fund, and the governance arrangements are statutorily prescribed. The Council complies with these requirements. For further details, please consult the [Norfolk Pension Fund Governance Strategy Statement 2022](#).
- 2.6 The Council hosts or is represented on several Joint Committees, which are:
- Norfolk Records Committee,
 - Norfolk Joint Museum Committee,
 - Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO),
 - Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority,
 - Norfolk Parking Partnership Joint Committee,

- Norfolk and Waveney Joint Health Scrutiny Committee,
- The then Joint Committee for Transport for Norwich, until 26 January 2023, (formerly the Joint Committee for Transforming Cities Fund projects, until June 2021)

2.7 The Council currently owns nine companies; seven are limited by shares and two are limited by guarantee with no share ownership. In addition, two companies were dissolved during 2021-22 as they were no longer required. Further details are set out below: (seven are 100% owned, two are partially owned (two dissolved in 2021-2022) and two are limited by guarantee with no share ownership):

Active Companies:

- The largest wholly owned company by the Council is the Norse Group Limited. It is the parent company of NPS Property Consultants Limited, Norse Transport, Norse Eastern Limited, Norse Commercial Services Ltd and Norse Care Ltd, plus their subsidiaries. The group delivers a range of professional services to both public and private sector clients throughout the UK. The group's client lists include many local authorities and housing associations, government departments, health authorities and emergency services. For more information regarding NORSE and its services, please refer to its website at <http://www.norsegroup.co.uk>
- Hethel Innovation Ltd, is wholly owned by the Council. The primary purpose of the company is to support inclusive economic growth and deliver associated economic benefits for the benefit of Norfolk communities, particularly where there are specific challenges, or the market has failed to address need. The company owns and runs Hethel Engineering Centre, manages Scottow Enterprise Park on a lease from the Council, and promotes a variety of networks and events to promote enterprise in Norfolk. For more information, please refer to the website at <http://hethelinnovation.com/>.
- Independence Matters is a Community Interest Company (CIC) which started trading 1 November 2013. The Council owned 49% of the shares with the remaining shares held by an Employee Benefit Trust. A ten-year strategic partnership agreement was signed with Norfolk County Council in July 2019. Within the Partnership Agreement both parties have signalled the intention to transfer the 51% staff share ownership to Norfolk County Council to support future procurement if it is in the best interest of all parties. Staff shares were held by Independence Staff Matters Ltd as corporate trustee of the Independence Matters Employee Benefit Trust. Since the end of 2021/22 the Council purchased the remaining 51% of the shares and ownership is now 100%. The new partnership agreement has removed the block contract covering the traded services, with service predominately contracted using the relevant procurement framework. In response

to the issues facing a national home care provider and to ensure continuity of care, Home Support Matters was set up on 10th December 2018, as a wholly owned subsidiary of Independence Matters. For more information regarding Independence Matters please refer to its website at <http://independencematters.org.uk/>.

- Norfolk Safety Community Interest Company (CIC) operates in partnership with Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service, and provides a range of risk management, training and development and other services to public bodies, third sector organisations and businesses. The company is limited by guarantee with no share ownership and the guarantees are provided by County Council employees acting on behalf of the County Council. For more information on the CIC please refer to their website at <http://norfolksafety.org/>
- Legislator 1656 Limited is a holding company which is jointly owned with Norwich City Council and is controlled through each party owning 50% of the voting share capital. The company owns 100% of Legislator 1657 Limited whose principal activity is the leasing of investment properties. The companies were created when Norwich City Council and the County Council jointly sold 80.1% of their shares in Norwich Airport in 2004.
- Repton Property Developments Ltd was incorporated on 27 July 2017 and is wholly owned by the Council. Its primary objective is to undertake direct property development with the aim of maximising financial returns (capital receipts and revenue income) for the Council to support service delivery. Repton Property Developments has established two separate companies to manage the open spaces on sites currently being developed. These are St Edmund's Park Estate Management Limited and Bowlers Green Estate Management Limited. St Edmund's Park Estate Management Limited is a company limited by guarantee that has been set up as a management company for a site being developed in Acle, Norfolk. Bowlers Green Estate Management Limited is a company limited by guarantee that has been set up as a management company for a site being developed in Hopton, Norfolk. Once each site is complete and the last unit sold the management company will be transferred to the estate residents and Repton's involvement will cease.
- NCC Nurseries Limited is wholly owned by the Council and was incorporated on 27 November 2019. The company has been set up to provide nursery provision after the previous provider, Great Yarmouth Community Trust, went into receivership. The company has obtained alternative providers to run the nurseries. Cabinet agreed to dissolve the company at its meeting on 30 January 2023. Companies House published a notice 'Final Gazette dissolved via voluntary strike-off' on 12 September 2023.

- LCIF 2 Limited was incorporated on 29 August 2019. The company is a management company which is responsible for the set up and implementation of the Low Carbon Innovation Fund. The company is limited by guarantee with no share ownership and the guarantees are provided 50% by the Council and 50% by the University of East Anglia. The Fund will invest in equity and convertible loans to support growing technologies across three LEP areas (New Anglia, Hertfordshire and the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority).

Non-Active/Dissolved companies:

- NCC HH Limited, incorporated on 27 November 2019, was established to continue to provide alternative education provision at Horatio House Independent School which was under threat as a result of the previous provider, Great Yarmouth Community Trust, going into liquidation on 10 December 2019. NCC HH Ltd ceased actively trading on 31 August 2020 as the company had fulfilled its purpose and was dissolved on 21 December 2021.
- The Great Yarmouth Development Company, which was jointly owned with Great Yarmouth Borough Council, with each party owning 50%. The company was dissolved on 24 August 2021.
- NPLaw Ltd (formerly Public Law East Limited), incorporated on 13 February 2017, is a wholly owned company. It is currently dormant.

Where appropriate the wholly owned/partly owned companies have Council Member and/or Officer representation on their boards of directors. Assurance about the governance in place for Norse has been obtained through the reports received by their Internal Auditors and a signed Group Annual Assurance Statement. All other significant companies have provided an Annual Positive Assurance Statement and completed a supporting assurance table, confirming the effectiveness of their governance framework. No concerns have been identified. An internal audit was undertaken for Independence Matters and Norfolk Safety CIC. The governance of Independence Matters and Norfolk Safety CIC have been confirmed to be adequate. Work has been performed reviewing Norse's internal audit plan, Norse internal audit reports and minutes of the Norse Audit Committee. KPMG are responsible for performing their internal audits. There is a wide range of audit topics, and the results of the audits are reported back to the Audit Committee. Required actions from the audits performed are monitored. An external review was published on 26th August 2022 by Grant Thornton on the governance arrangements of Norse.

2.8 The Council is a partner in five pooling arrangements, detailed below:

- The Norfolk Learning Difficulties Pooled Fund now exists only as a legal entity as part of the arrangements for commissioning Learning Difficulties health services.

The Council now receives funding directly from Central Government as part of the formula funding

- Norfolk Medicines Support Service. The Council, the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board and Arden and Greater East Midlands Commissioning Support Unit, have put in place a Service Level Agreement which has been signed and have drafted a Section 75 agreement which is ready to sign that covers the formal arrangement into the future. The Norfolk and Waveney integrated Care Board (ICB) is the lead commissioner and Arden and GEM are the provider.
- There has been a Better Care Fund pooled arrangement in place, covering initially the five CCGs in Norfolk and then the subsequent merged Norfolk and Waveney CCG. Since July 2022, under the Health and Care Act (2022) CCGs were abolished and the local CCG has been replaced with the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board (ICB). A new Section 75 for 2021-22 has been created and signed. The Better Care Fund (BCF) requires local authorities with responsibility for social services and the ICB to create a pooled commissioning fund for the provision of integrated health and community care services, with a priority purpose of supporting the integration of health and care. It incorporates Better Care Fund monies and Improved Better Care Fund grant. The pooled fund is secured through an agreement under section 75 of the National Health Service Act 2006. The Norfolk and Waveney ICS Executive oversees the governance of the pooled fund. The Better Care Fund plan, which sets out how funds are spent, is required to be approved by the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Council administers the pooled funds.
- Norfolk County Council with all seven district councils participated in the Norfolk Business Rates Pool until 2020-21, including a 75% Business Rates Pilot Pool in 2019-20. The Pool enables Norfolk Authorities to retain revenue from additional business rates growth by avoiding a levy on growth which would otherwise be payable to Central Government. Up to 2020-21, pooled funds were used to support economic development projects in Norfolk with Norfolk Leaders approving the allocation of funds to projects. Norfolk Leaders agreed to suspend Business Rate pooling in 2021-22 in view of the risks to business rates income related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pooling has been reinstated for 2022-23 to include the County and all seven district councils, following agreement by Norfolk Leaders. Under the new governance agreement for the 2022-23 Pool, any gains are to be redistributed to individual Pool members who will make their own decisions about how the funds are to be used.
- Norfolk County Council acts as the accountable body for the Greater Norwich Growth Board Infrastructure Investment Fund. The 2013 Greater Norwich City Deal

allows, amongst other things, access to £60 million of Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) borrowing at a reduced rate to fund strategic infrastructure. The agreement included a commitment from Broadland District Council, Norwich City Council and South Norfolk Council to pool CIL income, and in October 2015 an agreement including Norfolk County Council was signed to pool CIL income in order to create a substantial local growth fund to support local infrastructure projects". Further information can be found at www.greaternorwichgrowth.org.uk/

- 2.9 Norfolk County Council has been designated to manage the 2014-2020 France (Channel) England Interreg Va European programme.

The programme is an EU Commission programme funded through the Cohesion Fund and provides up to €223M of grant covering the geographic area of South and East England and Northern France. This will leverage up to a total of €315M of funds (with match funding). The programme budget is agreed by the French and UK Governments. The Cooperation Programme (CP) was approved by both national governments and by the Commission in October 2015. For further information please refer to their website www.channelmanche.com/en/programme/about-the-programme/

Following the UK Government's EU (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill i.e. "Brexit", the programme is guaranteed to continue until its natural conclusion in line with the Cooperation Programme.

Within the Council, a Project Board has been set up to oversee the management of risks this initiative generates for the authority. The Managing Authority reports into the existing governance arrangements for the Council.

The Audit Authority reports to the Audit Committee on progress made against the audit strategy and audit plan. Should significant issues arise and fail to be resolved with regards to the management and control system, these would be reported to the Audit Committee. The annual report for 1/7/2020 to 30/06/21 stated "Our assessment of the management and control system over 2020/21 is 'qualified with limited impact'".

The programme also has its own governance arrangements involving Member States and EC representatives.

3. The purpose of a governance framework

- 3.1 A governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values by which the Council is directed and controlled and through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the County Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and consider whether they have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.
- 3.2 The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework 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 to identify and prioritise such risks. It evaluates the likelihood of them being realised and the impact they would have should they be realised and helps manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

- 3.3 All wholly owned companies have a system of governance which is the responsibility of their Board of Directors and designed to give the Directors adequate information to review the activities of the Group and review and control the business risks.

4. The Governance Framework

- 4.1 The Council achieves good standards of governance by applying the principles of Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (CIPFA/SOLACE, 2016).

The Council's Code of Corporate Governance sets out the Council's governance standards. These standards ensure the Council is doing the right things, in the right way in a timely, inclusive, open, effective, honest and accountable manner. The Code is based upon the following principles:

- 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**
- G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.**

- 4.2 These principles represent best practice and are taken from the 'International Framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector' produced by CIPFA/IFAC. Good governance is dynamic and involves continuous evaluation and review. To achieve good governance the Council should achieve their intended outcomes, while acting in the public interest at all times. As overarching requirements for acting in the public interest, principles A and B apply across all other principles (C – G).

- 4.3 The Council's [Code of Corporate Governance](#) details the arrangements in place to comply with each of the principles. This Annual Governance Statement reviews the effectiveness of those arrangements and references any governance changes that took place, as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak.

- 4.4 The Council established internal staffing and wellbeing procedures to ensure that staff and managers were and, continue to be, fully supported and resourced when working remotely or in the community.

5. Effectiveness of the governance framework

- 5.1 The Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control.

That review is informed by:

- The work of the Head of Paid Service and Executive Directors within the County Council who are responsible for the development and maintenance of the governance environment
- The statutory roles of the Council's Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer
- The signed departmental assurance statements received and signed by Executive Directors for 2021-22
- The Annual Governance Statement working group
- Work performed by Internal Audit
- Comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorate
- Systems and controls carried out as outlined in the Code of Corporate Governance.

Responsibility for this annual review has been delegated to the Audit Committee. **Overall, it is considered the Council's governance arrangements continue to be fit for purpose, in accordance with the governance framework.**

- 5.2 The effectiveness of the governance framework can be demonstrated by the following:

- **Principle A - Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.**
 - Executive Directors confirmed, in all significant respects services comply with the Council's Constitution, Financial Regulations and key policies and procedures which include for declarations of interest, compliments and complaints and whistleblowing. Where required, actions are in place to ensure full compliance.
 - During the year there has been some confusion about the Terms of Reference and remit in respect of the Joint Committee for Transport for Norwich (formerly the Joint Committee for Transforming Cities Fund projects, until June 2021). These have now been resolved. A report was presented to the Joint Committee for Transport for Norwich on 29 September 2022. Confusion over the legal status of this Committee has led to governance issues previously, therefore it was necessary to update the Terms of Reference and ensure that they are understood by all members. A

recommendation was accepted that the Terms of Reference be adopted by the Committee and recommended to Cabinet for endorsement. The then Transport for Norwich Advisory Committee met on 26 January 2023. An Individual Cabinet Member decision was published on 5 September 2023, to approve establishing a Transport for Norwich Steering Group, to replace the existing Transport for Norwich Advisory Committee with immediate effect. The Council continues to keep Joint Committees under a rolling review to ensure consistency and lawfulness of decisions.

- The Constitution was reviewed. Proposed amendments were considered by the Corporate Select Committee at its meeting on 23 May 2022. There is a period of consultation with all members, and it was taken back to the Corporate Select Committee on 11 July before proposals were considered by Full Council on 19 July 2022.
- A register of Members interests, and a register of gifts and hospitality is published for each Member on the Norfolk County Council internet. Controls are in place to keep these up to date.
- The Standards Committee met once during 2021-22 on 29th March 2022. The role of the Standards Committee is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by councillors and co-opted members. Following constitutional changes agreed by Full Council on 19th of July 2022 the Audit and Standards Committee have merged. The Council have since agreed that the Committee will be called the Audit and Governance Committee.
- Progress on the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objectives 2020-2023 was reported to [Cabinet in December 2021](#) at page 535 of that report..
- The then Monitoring Officer's Annual Report was reported to the Audit Committee in November 2022. There are no exceptions to report.

- **Principle B – Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.**

- Cabinet, Scrutiny Committee, Select Committees and Full County Council have met regularly throughout the year. The Council encourages openness and accountability by making available the agenda and public reports to the public prior to the meetings, and minutes are available afterwards. There is provision for the public to ask questions. All meetings were filmed and streamed live on You Tube on the NCC Democratic Services Channel. Decisions taken at Cabinet and Full County Council have been recorded in minutes.
- A [Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework](#) , updated in January 2021, has been endorsed by all stakeholder authorities. It includes the shared

objectives with Norfolk's Local Planning Authorities (including Norfolk County Council).

- A [Customer Service Charter](#) sits at the heart of how we relate to each customer.
 - There is an agreed Communication Strategy and Media Protocol delivered by the media team.
 - Decisions taken by the Head of Paid Service and Portfolio Holders are published as a Summary which is reported to Cabinet. Any Delegated Decisions called in from those made by Cabinet Members are considered at a subsequent Scrutiny Committee.
 - During the year the Council has effectively engaged with stakeholders, residents and people who use the services provided. The Council consults on changes to services and other key decisions, such as the annual budget. The Council embraces the “We Asked, You Said, We Did” approach to consultation by publishing key findings from consultations and feeding back how these have contributed to council decisions.
 - The Council continued with extended digital engagement with residents and stakeholders in order to meet the challenges and issues presented by COVID-19. The annual budget consultation and feedback from residents were via webinars led by our Cabinet Member for Finance and senior officers. The Norfolk Residents Panel, designed to reach out to a broad make up of people from across all seven districts in Norfolk and representative of our local population remained a strong engagement platform. This engagement platform is now in its second year and was created to give a voice to a wide cross section of Norfolk's population, to understand what they are thinking and what they want to see from the council in the future. All recruitment and contact with our panel members have been conducted online and this included invitations to online focus groups chaired by our Members.
- **Principle C – Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable, social and environmental benefits.**
 - [Together, for Norfolk 2019-2025](#) was launched in June 2019 and outlined the ambitions for the County and the plan that would deliver them. In March 2020, a ‘Together, for our Future’ Summit was held, followed by the ‘Rising To the Challenge Together’ Summit in July 2021, to bring together key stakeholders from across Norfolk to talk about the challenges we face together and how we can overcome them to ensure a sustainable future for all.
 - Aspects of the implementation of the Council plan were impacted by the Covid pandemic, which led to a number of national lockdowns and during which the Council focused on responding to the crisis and providing direct support to individuals, families, communities, schools and businesses.

- Through the experience in responding to the Covid pandemic, the interaction with residents and partners, and analysis of the latest data, it was known that the broad ambitions remain the same, but a sharper focus was needed on a specific set of critical priorities that will enable the Council to prioritise activities.
- On 29 November 2021, Norfolk County Council formally adopted the new strategy [Better Together, for Norfolk 2021-2025](#). The strategy builds on the vision and ambitions set out in the 2019 corporate plan and has been updated to reflect the needs and priorities for Norfolk as we emerge from the pandemic.
- The strategy outlines the Council’s definition of “levelling up” in Norfolk and is structured around these five key strategic and interlinking priorities:
 - A vibrant and sustainable economy – this priority is about growing the economy inclusively, so that everyone has opportunities to benefit. It is about growing the skills the County needs and creating high value jobs; drawing down investment; and developing our infrastructure and digital connectivity
 - Better opportunities for children and young people – this priority is about raising educational standards and attainment in our County, improving the lives of families and children, and creating better employment opportunities for young people
 - Healthy, fulfilling and independent lives – this priority focuses on the themes of levelling up health, ensuring people who face disadvantage and poor health can live well, and have access to better services where they live
 - Strong, engaged and inclusive communities – this priority focuses on improving the relationships between communities and public service provision, so that people and communities are supported, empowered, enabled to help themselves, and have a voice in how services are designed and delivered
 - A greener, more resilient future – this priority recognises the critical importance of climate change and the environment, as well as the role that our physical and social infrastructure play in creating stronger communities that people can be proud of.

As part of its commitment to foster the environmental, social and economic well-being of the community, Norfolk County Council will work towards enabling people in Norfolk to benefit from an enhanced environment and quality of life – as described in its [Environmental Policy](#). This work will be underpinned by a Climate Change Action Plan, which was agreed for commissioning by Cabinet during April 2022, [see April 2022 Cabinet Paper](#) (page 295). Since November 2022 significant strides have been made in relation to the net zero programme.

- **Principle D – Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.**

- During the year Cabinet received performance monitoring reports on the identified key areas (vital signs). These included performance dashboards

and a detailed review of those areas not performing as expected. These provided both quantitative and qualitative performance information. Where performance is not meeting expectations, the reasons why are discussed and the required action to improve performance is identified.

- The digital performance system provides a clear line of sight from our strategic goals through to our operational plans. Each Executive Director/Departmental Management Team uses the system to review performance and provide challenge on at least a monthly basis.
- The launch of the new strategy, [Better Together, for Norfolk 2021-2025](#), and the reassessment of the strategic priorities and financial challenges, has provided the opportunity to review the existing framework, measures and associated management tools, to ensure it is fit for purpose and aligned with the strategy. This includes checking key metrics and performance can be compared to and validated through external sources and benchmarks.
- External challenge has been provided through benchmarking, inspections and peer reviews. Details of other inspections and peer reviews are included in Appendix 1.
- The publication of the strategy also set out a commitment to develop a number of products that will contribute to the delivery of our strategic priorities, more specifically:
 - An annual, rolling Corporate Delivery Plan, to contain critical activities that will contribute to the delivery of our strategy and the key areas of focus for the next performance year.
 - A refreshed Communication strategy, to ensure effective and targeted communications with our residents and stakeholders across local, regional and national systems.
 - A refreshed Workforce strategy, to ensure the Council has people with the skills, knowledge and experience required to achieve its strategic objectives and respond to current and future challenges.
- Since 2021-22, On 11th January 2023 Cabinet approved the Organisational Performance Framework, which sets out the principles and governance arrangements by which the Council shall manage oversight of its performance. The Framework sets out the minimum standards expected for performance management across the Organisation as well as the intentions for further development of supportive tools to assist Managers and Leaders in continuing to make evidence-based decisions.
- At their meeting on 4 April 2022, Cabinet approved the Corporate Delivery Plan. The Corporate Delivery Plan is supported and underpinned by a number of internal processes and systems, to ensure timely oversight successful delivery of the benefits defined within. Depending on the nature of the activity, these systems vary, from programme specific boards to the formal Council governance as defined by the Council's Constitution or may simply be part of the departmental plans and be monitored through the standard operational KPIs and our Corporately Significant Vital Signs.
- A number of related performance indicators currently form part of our Corporately Significant Vital Signs and are reviewed quarterly. Work to fully review all our Vital Signs to ensure internal alignment to the strategy delivery is underway.

- A Transformation & Innovation Board was implemented and is aimed at providing valuable governance, so that leadership can direct the NCC portfolio of change, gain best value from our investment and improve certainty of outcomes. The main objectives of the Board are to direct what action can be taken when programmes and projects are outside of tolerance, ensure plans are viewed from a pan-organisational perspective, and support planned assurance points that provide insight and recommendations to improve certainty of outcomes.
- **Principle E – Developing the entity’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.**
 - Preparations were made to implement a new HR and Finance system, myOracle, replacing a number of finance, procurement and HR systems enabling managers and employees to manage their own data, actions and supports effective recruitment and development. Phased implementation started in April 2022 and continued over the remainder of that year.
 - The focus has been to enable managers to lead their people to embrace and make the most of hybrid working as part of our Smarter Working approach. The Performance Development Framework, Our Voice Our Council staff survey, management standard apprenticeships and leadership development framework have all supported this along with a range of well-being services.
 - A new workforce strategy has been drafted to respond to and compliment Better Together, for Norfolk. It sets direction for 2023 including the following themes:
 - NCC’s size, shape and role in the wider system
 - Leadership and Performance
 - Equality Diversity and Inclusion
 - Culture, engagement, and wellbeing
 - Attract and retain talent through roles, skills and careers
 - Making the most of technology through skills, self-service and hybrid working
 - A strategic review is being performed to understand and adapt the organisation to improve effectiveness and efficiency including how we describe jobs, career families and structures. This will enable departmental workforce plans to be developed/aligned and for managers and leaders to respond to new ways of working and the emerging strategies and challenges facing the council.
 - The annual staff survey was conducted in March 2022 and provides statistically robust insight into colleagues’ perceptions of their experience working at NCC. Detailed action plans are owned by each directorate and progress on these is governed by the NCC Corporate Board. The Board receive reports on the results of the survey and the progress with departmental action plans to support this process.
 - We have refreshed the Learning and Development offer for members and officers to ensure everyone is aware of their responsibilities and are equipped in their roles.
 - All Senior Managers have objectives included in their Performance Development Plan 22-23 linked to the organisational priorities including:
 - Better, Together for Norfolk
 - Strategic Organisational Review

- Developing an inclusive culture
- Financial Leadership
- Smarter and hybrid working

These are adapted to be specific and relevant for their areas of accountability.

- **Principle F – Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management**

- **Risk Management**

- During 2021/22, and to date, risk management continued to play a prominent role in the key decisions of the Council as we moved through the pandemic.
- **Corporate Risks**
Treatment of the generic corporate risks has continued, with quarterly reporting of these risks to the Council’s Cabinet and Audit Committee throughout the year. This has been supported by the Council’s Corporate Board. Cabinet Members were updated throughout the year on corporate risks within their risk portfolio.
- The financial environment for local government remains extremely challenging for the foreseeable future, and any future reductions to staffing levels may impact the Council’s ability to adequately resource teams to ensure governance is adequate and effective. Three current corporate risks are relevant to governance:
 - RM002 The potential risk to manage significant reductions in local and national income streams
 - RM006 The potential risk of failure to deliver our available for period 2021/22 to end of 2023/24
 - RM029 NCC may not have the employees (or a sufficient number of employees) with critical skills that will be required for the organisation to operate effectively in the next 2 to 5 years and longer term. Actions are being taken to reduce the likelihood and impact of the risks.
- The Risk Management Officer continues to contribute to wider risk management on a regional and national level, becoming the Chair of the East Midlands and East Anglia risk management group for Local Authority based Risk Managers at the end of 2021/22.
- The Risk Management Officer and the Organisational Performance Lead have implemented and are chairing a joint Performance & Risk Forum, which meets quarterly with Directorate Leads to discuss arising matters and to ensure we have the right remedies in place to manage the treatment of performance and risk issues.
- Under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (The Act), the Council, with the PCC, is the statutory Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA). The Act makes it a statutory requirement for the Fire and Rescue Authority to produce an

Integrated Risk Management Plan. Norfolk FRA published its Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) for 2020-23 January 2020. Go to the latest published annual [Norfolk Fire and Rescue Statement of Assurance 2019/20](#).

Audit & Governance Committee

- The Committee have met four times between 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. Where reports are Key Issues – Amber and Key Issues – Red a summary of the recommendations are included for the audits.
- Outstanding corporate high priority audit recommendations are followed up to ensure controls are put in place as soon as possible. A summary of the outstanding corporate high priority audit findings is reported to the Committee.
- Since March 2022, an Annual Internal Audit Report from the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services/Chief Internal Auditor was made to the Committee at its July 2022 meeting. There were no exceptions to report.

Scrutiny

- The Scrutiny Committee and three Select Committees constitute the Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements pursuant to section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000.
- The Scrutiny Committee monitors the decisions made by the Cabinet, Officers making executive decisions on delegated authority and other decisions. During the year the Scrutiny Committee has 'called-in' seven decisions which have been made. This enabled them to consider whether the decision taken was appropriate.
- In April 2022 the Scrutiny committee looked at the council's strategy and priorities, the council's financial planning and measuring the performance of the council's environmental policy.

Financial Management

- To ensure financial sustainability the Council plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services. Responsible Budget Officers are responsible for managing their budgets effectively. At the end of every month financial information on expenditure is produced including forecast expenditure and the planned impact on earmarked reserves. Finance Monitoring Reports have been discussed monthly at Cabinet.
- Systems and processes for financial administration, financial control and protection of the Council's resources and assets are in place and these are continually reviewed to ensure they meet the Council's business requirements. These controls are clearly described in the Financial Regulations in the Constitution and the Council's Medium -Term Financial Management agreed by the Council in February 2022. In addition, a Going Concern Statement has been produced to provide additional assurance.
- Budget planning cycle for 2023- 24 commenced in April 2022 and incorporates a full review of how the Council operates to deliver its future

services and strategy. As part of this, a thorough interrogation of identified future cost pressures will be required. The Council continues to face unprecedented cost pressures and material uncertainty about the wider financial operating environment. COVID-19, and its legacy, represents a significant challenge for service delivery and public finances as the Council works to rebuild and revitalise the County.

- A new ERP system, myOracle, incorporating finance, procurement and HR systems went live in April 2022.
- Details of how the Council considers it achieves compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management Code are detailed in section 17 of the [Revenue Budget report to Full Council](#) in February 2022 (page 164).
- Maintaining sound reserves is absolutely vital and a key indicator of sound financial governance. The Council has reported holding general reserves balances of 5.1% as a percentage of its net 2021-22 Council Tax Requirement, as reported to [Cabinet in January 2022, page 497](#). Since March 2022, the County Council holds balances of 5.2% as a percentage of its net 2022-23 Council Tax Requirement, as reported to [Cabinet](#) in January 2023, see page 391.

Management of performance of third parties

- Performance of wholly owned companies is monitored by Senior Officers and Members either being Board Members or attending Board Meetings.
- The NCC Owner Companies Governance Panel has been set up to provide oversight of and support the development of the companies that NCC either wholly or partly owns. Its tasks include ensuring there are adequate governance arrangements in place in respect of the Companies and monitor the financial performance of each Company throughout the year and make recommendations to Cabinet as appropriate. The Panel met twice during the 2021-22 year.
- During the last two financial years, social care demand driven from acute hospital discharge has risen dramatically. This has created more demand for our care market, including more complex support. The Council have worked closely with the care market, and its care association, to ensure a consistency of safe and quality provision of care. Norfolk, like many Local Authority areas, is experiencing capacity shortages in certain critical care markets and supporting the sustainability of Norfolk's care market is a key priority. The Council set up a member led task and finish group, which led to an internal improvement plan.
- All the Executive Directors have confirmed there are approved protocols, signed contracts and effective governance arrangements in place for work performed by third parties.
- Following recommendations from the Strategic Review, a Commissioning & Procurement Leadership Group (CPLG) and Commercial Board have been set up. The CPLG enables coordination and alignment between the Council's commissioning and procurement activity, (including consideration of joint commissioning arrangements) to establish a shared view of opportunities to deliver value for money across key categories of NCC

contracted spend to provide assurance and strategic oversight of contract pipeline, performance, and cross cutting planning.

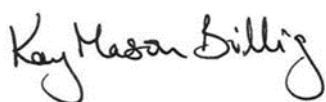
- **Principle G - Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit, to deliver effective accountability.**
 - During the year the Council has published information, including reports, in a manner which is accessible to citizens and other stakeholders. The Council complies with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 by publishing accurate data within appropriate time frames.
 - Reporting on performance, value for money and stewardship have been included in the Annual Report, Statements of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement.
 - The then Audit Committee considered matters of governance, including internal audit, risk management, anti-fraud and corruption, the annual statement of accounts, treasury management and external audit during 2021/22.
 - An Annual Internal Audit Report from the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services/Chief Internal Auditor, for 2021-22 was made to the then Audit Committee at its July 2021 meeting. There were no exceptions to report.
 - All Executive Directors have confirmed staff are aware of their responsibility to report upwards any unresolved matters of concern about internal control.
 - A Wholly Owned Trading Companies Governance Panel has been established and reviews the governance and reporting of the Council's companies.

6. Review of Effective Action on Significant Governance Issues 2020/21

6.1 There were no significant governance issues reported in 2020-21.

7. Significant Governance Issues

7.1 There are no significant governance issues to report for 2021-22 and to date. The Council has a robust risk management function where corporate risks were managed through Cabinet and reported to the then Audit Committee during the year.



Councillor Kay Mason Billig
Leader of the Council
19 February 2024



Tom McCabe
Chief Executive
19 February 2024

Notes:

Note 1: The following senior officers have contributed to drafting this statement

- Head of Paid Service
- Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services
- Executive Director of Adult Social Services
- Executive Director of Children's Services
- (The then) Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services (Section 151 Officer)
- Director of Transformation
- Director for People
- (The then) Director of Governance
- Director of Financial Management

Executive Directors/Directors who have produced signed Annual Positive Assurance Statements and supporting assurance tables

Head of Paid Service and Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services
Executive Director of Adult Social Services
Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services
Executive Director of Children's Services
Executive Director of Strategy and Transformation
The then Director of Governance

Appendix 1

External Reviews carried out during the year

Finance and Commercial Services

The overall key message in the external auditor's (EY) Independent auditor's report - NCC financial statements (available on the Council Finance webpage [Statement of Accounts 2020-21](#)) was that an unqualified opinion was issued on the Council's accounts for 2020-21.

The County Council was also given an unqualified 'Value for Money' opinion, within the [Independent auditor's report](#) - NCC financial statements.

An independent review of the Council's Risk Management arrangements was conducted by Zurich Insurance and was reported in May 2021. The review concluded that the Risk Management principals were 'Embedded'. A number of recommendations were made to further strengthen the arrangements, which are being progressed.

Children's Services

The government's response to Josh MacAlister's independent review of children's social care was published on Thursday the 3rd of February and will be subject to a 12 week consultation. We await the government's response to the SEND green paper consultation.

An Ofsted visit was undertaken in October 2021 looking at the arrangements for children in care, including the quality of planning and decision making for children in care and the experience and progress of children living in unregulated or unregistered provision. They also evaluated the performance and quality assurance arrangements. The consistent quality of matching and placement planning information has been an area of practice focus since the visit. This will ensure paperwork always reflects that depth of knowledge obtained about the children and therefore supports carers to meet needs most effectively. Also the timeliness, rigour and recording of assessments of family and friend foster carers has been reviewed, tightened and reinforced – in terms of recording the assessments in the right way and ensure they are signed off within appropriate timescales.

In November 2021 an evaluation on the Public Law Outline (PLO) process was undertaken to ensure it is used as a restorative tool in supporting families and avoid going to Court. Work is being performed to ensure the restorative practice model is further embedded to ensure consistency across all areas of practice. An evaluation of the organisational structures (policies and procedures, scheme of delegation, management oversight processes and local resources available) to support the use of the PLO process was also undertaken. Several actions were required to improve the process; including the embedding the review process to address delays and drift in the PLO process, implementing the new PLO dashboard and embedding the performance culture at all operational levels, cases to be reviewed at 9 months to ensure progress is on track, an increased focus on management case notes to evidence decision making and ensuring the recording reflects the rationale of the decision making.

In November 2022 the LA children services were subject to a standard ILACS known as an Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services, the inspection looked at the support the council offers children and families from before birth through to adult life. The judgement relates to all services from early help and prevention, to more specialist support for families with the greatest needs.

The report published on Friday 13 January 2023, Ofsted said "significant improvements" had been made in services for children and their families, recognising stable and determined leadership, investment in services, and "compassionate, warm and committed workers and carers." Inspectors have praised Children's Services at Norfolk County Council, judging the authority as "good" and highlighting "exemplary" and "exceptional" areas of practice.

Inspectors said children's "voices, wishes and feelings shine brightly" in case records and described children and young people's participation as a strength of the authority.

An Ofsted Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) revisit inspection was conducted in November 2022 and the report was published on the 7th of February 2023. the revisit was carried out to assess whether Norfolk County Council and Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board (ICB) had made sufficient progress in addressing the three areas of significant weakness in services and support identified by our full Area SEND Inspection in 2020

During their visit inspectors spoke with children and young people with SEND and their parents and carers as well as parent carer groups and council and ICB leaders.

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) concluded that Norfolk has made the required progress to address the significant weaknesses in support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

This SEND Ofsted/CQC report, coupled with the recent positive Ofsted inspection of Norfolk Children's Services, highlights the shared determination to continue to improve services for children and their families.

Adult Social Services

In Adult Social Services, we have a vision "to support people to be independent, resilient and well". For the past five years, we have delivered this vision using our Promoting Independence Strategy. In June 2021 an external partner, Newton Europe, was procured to undertake a detailed diagnostic, specifically around the Adult Social Care Front Door and Prevention offer. The output of the diagnostic assessment was a series of reports which highlighted major opportunities to change in this area of the business. This work identified exciting opportunities to look beyond just our front door to also focus on prevention, initial engagement, and longer-term social care intervention and pathways. As a result of the diagnostic exercise in January 2022 the Council agreed to enter into a strategic partnership to deliver the transformation required to deliver these opportunities.

We have developed the Connecting Communities Transformation Programme to help us achieve these improvements and are 9 months into the 18 month change cycle. The benefits accruing from these changes will accumulate over a 5 year period and provide a strong foundation to build upon. At the heart of this programme is an aim to help people in

Norfolk access the right service for them at the right time. Key to this change is to work in partnership with front line teams, the voluntary sector, providers, and districts to empower communities to develop the support they require, specific to their unique strengths and needs.

The Adult Social Services department actively engages in the Local Government Association (LGA) and Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) Sector led improvement programme. This 12 month rolling programme includes the utilisation of an internal self-assessment tool, independent led challenge sessions and a buddy challenge session with a local authority peer from the Eastern region. In addition to this programme, the department also requested a peer review assessment as part of the preparation for any assurance regime that is due to commence from April 2023. This peer review took place in the summer of 2022 and the learning fully absorbed into future assurance planning.

Community and Environmental Services

- Adult Learning:

In May 2021 – Awarded Adult and Community Learning provider of the year 2021 by the Times Educational Supplement.

In November 2021 – Awarded with the Library and Information service, the national Smarter Working Award for Creating Communities during Covid.

- NFRS:

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services' (HMCFRS) Round 2 inspection was carried out in September/October 2021, looking at all areas of NFRS activity. The [report](#) concluded improvements were required to be made.

Between 28 November and 2 December 2022, HMCFRS, revisited Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service to review progress against the action plan. They explored whether the right levels of leadership and oversight were in place.

The inspection team was pleased to see that the service had taken steps to address the cause of concern. They recognised the considerable work that has been carried out to support these improvements. The service is making prevention a high priority. The service has a comprehensive action plan, and governance arrangements in place to oversee it. Improvements have been made in response to all the recommendations, significantly in identifying vulnerability and safeguarding. However, more needs to be done to support on-call firefighters to implement prevention activities and to ensure all firefighters understand and fulfil their statutory duty to undertake prevention activities. More needs to be done to ensure reviews after significant or fatal fires are undertaken in a timely manner or within the service's timeline as defined in its policy. They will continue to monitor progress through updates from the service and data returns. When HMCFRS next inspect the service in 2023, they will assess progress against these recommendations.

- Trading Standards:

An annual assessment by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS), as the UK National Accreditation Body, is performed to confirm that the Trading Standards calibration laboratory is meeting the standards required to maintain its accreditation status. At the full reassessment performed by UKAS in June 2021, the assessment team were once again extremely complimentary of the services provided and confirmed that compliance and confidence in measurement is being achieved on a continuing basis. It was recommended that accreditation is maintained for the current scope of accreditation under ISO/IEC 17025:2017.

Actions required and completed:

- Include units in one Work Instruction
- Revise uncertainty budget to include rounding error at secondary level.

Recertification BS EN ISO 9001:2015 by Alcumus, including the certified calibration, testing, verification and hire activities performed by the Calibration, Verification and Testing Services team was carried out in April 2021. It was confirmed all areas are being maintained in accordance with requirements.

An annual assessment was conducted in May 2021 by our nominated Radiation Protection Advisor (RPA) to ensure that controls the Trading Standards laboratory has in place, when using ionising radiation (IR), comply with the legal requirements of the IRR17. This provides the laboratory with consent to use IR within the Trading Standards' laboratory facilities at Hethel Engineering Centre.

The bi-annual inspection by the Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA) was carried out in November 2021. The SGSA found that the Council had discharged their responsibilities to a high standard.

Governance

Nplaw had its external Lexcel (the Law Society's legal practice quality mark for excellence in legal practice management and excellence in client care) assessment in February 2022 and its accreditation as a legal practice was renewed.

We have brought PA Consulting in as an external partner to work with us in developing proposals and implementation planning for a strategic review. Since the end of 2021/22 The first phase of the review has been completed, proposals developed and agreed. Implementation has commenced, the first tranche of changes to organisational design and structure have been consulted on and ratified.

The Information Commissioners Office (ICO) has now confirmed that it is going to issue Norfolk County Council with a reprimand as it has determined that we have failed in our duty under UK GDPR to provide data subjects with access to their information in a timely fashion during the period 6 April 2021 to 6 April 2022. There is no financial penalty attached and our Monitoring Officer has not deemed it necessary to issue a Section 5 report. To address the issue, additional resources have been made available over the last 3 years within the IG team, with good progress being made in relation to timescales and backlog. Other improvements have also been made, particularly around processes and technology, ensuring that the requests are being managed as efficiently and effectively as

possible. The current plan is that the backlog will be eliminated and responses back within statutory timescales by the end of 2023. The reprimand was published, in May 2023, and they require an update on progress in relation to the recommendations by 6 November 2023.