Brent Council Annual Governance Statement 2021/22

1.   Scope of Responsibility

1.1   Brent Council ('The 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, 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 in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The Council is responsible for ensuring that there is a sound system of governance (incorporating the system of internal control). This includes group activities.

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

1.3   The Council has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance, which is consistent with the principles of the International Framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector. The statement is included in the annual review of the Constitution undertaken each year by the Director of Legal HR Audit & Investigations. A copy of the Council's code is contained in part 5 of the Council's Constitution and can be found on our website:

https://data.brent.gov.uk/dataset/2jgp6/constitution-brent-council

1.4   This statement explains how the Council has complied with the code and also meets the requirements of Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, regulation 6(1b), which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an annual governance statement. To ensure all statutory requirements have been met the statement has been produced in accordance with the CIPFA Delivering Good Governance Framework 2016.

2.   The Purpose of the Governance Framework

2.1   The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values by which the authority is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads its communities. It enables the authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate services and value for money. 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 on-going process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood and potential impact of those risks being realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

2.2   The governance framework has been in place for the year ended 31 March 2022 and up to the date of approval of the statement of accounts.

3.   The Governance Framework

3.1   The key elements of the systems and processes that comprise the Council's governance arrangements are based on the seven core principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Governance Framework.

3.2   The arrangements for reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework are detailed in section 4 of this statement.
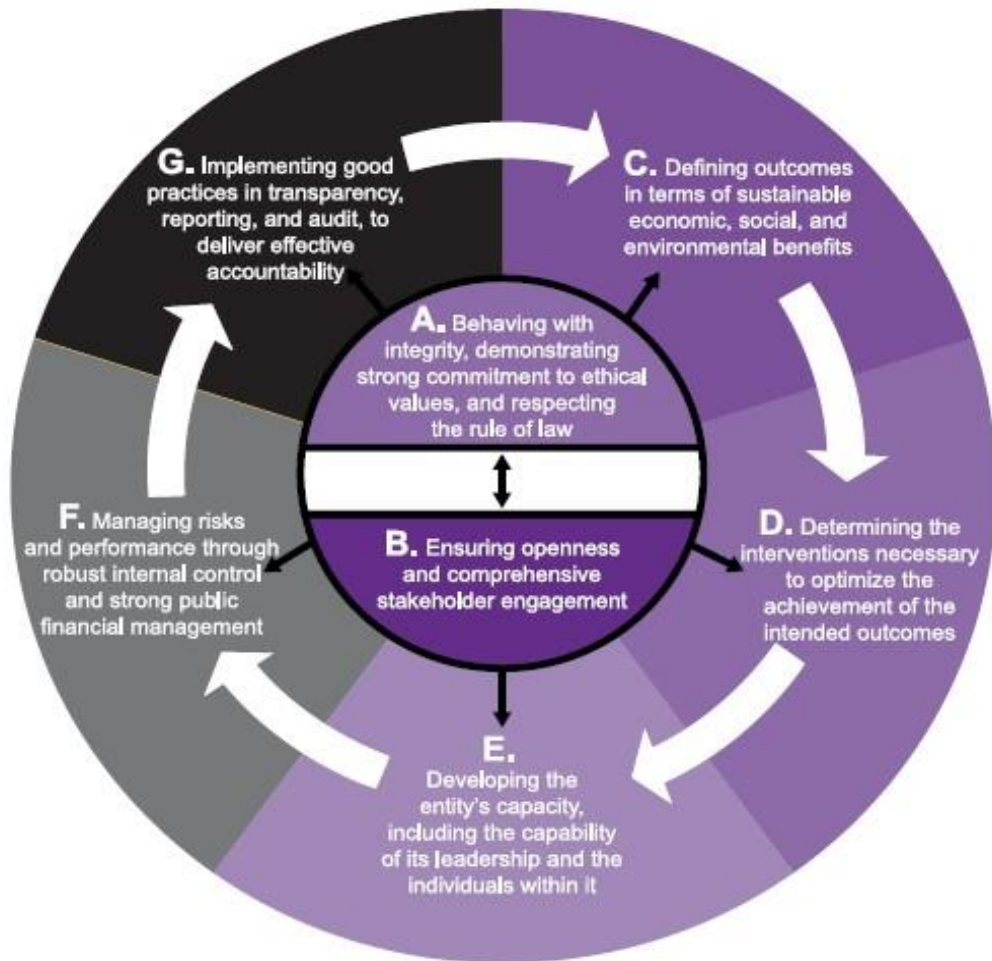
3.3   Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

3.3.1   The Constitution sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the policies that are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. The Constitution comprises six parts, that set out the basic rules for governing the Council's business, as well as detailed procedures and codes of practice.

3.3.2   The Constitution is regularly reviewed and was last updated in February 2022. The Constitution sets out the responsibilities of both members and officers. In particular, the Council has identified the following six statutory posts:

Legislation	Statutory Post	Officer
S4 Local Government and Housing Act 1989	Head of Paid Service	Chief Executive
Section 151 Local Government Act 1972	Section 151	Director of Finance

S5 Local Government and Housing Act 1989	Monitoring Officer	Director of Legal, HR , Audit & Investigations
S18 Children Act 2004	Director of Children's Services	Strategic Director Children and Young People
S6 Local Authority Social Services Act 1972	Director of Adult Social Services	Operational Director Adult Services
Health and Director of Public Health Social Care Act 2012	Health and Director of Public Health Social Care	Director of Public Health

3.3.3   A Scheme of Delegation sets out the powers delegated to officers as part of the Constitution. The Financial Regulations are also part of the Constitution, together with the Code of Corporate Governance and the Contract Standing Orders. Changes to the Constitution (other than minor changes which can be approved by the Director of Legal, HR, Audit & Investigations) are approved by the full Council and published on the external website.

3.3.4   The Member Code of Conduct is set out in the Constitution, together with other codes. These are included in the annual constitutional review.

3.3.5   A register of member interests and gifts and hospitality is maintained and entries are reported quarterly to the Audit & Standards Advisory Committee.

3.3.6   All Councillors receive training on the requirements of the Code of Conduct and related issues. Monitoring Officer Advice Notes give advice to members on decision making and standards of conduct.

3.3.7   All staff, in particular managers, are responsible for ensuring that laws and regulations are complied with and that the authority's policies are implemented in practice. Strategic Directors, Operational Directors and Heads of Service are responsible for monitoring implementation of the Council's policies.

3.3.8   The Council has a number of key governance related policies. Officers are made aware of their responsibilities through general communications, such as Weekly Round Up, manager briefings, staff events and via the induction process.

3.3.9   The Council operates a robust anti-fraud and corruption culture and has an established Anti-Fraud and Bribery Policy and a separate Whistleblowing policy. These policies set out the duties of all staff in relation to acting with honesty and integrity and the reporting suspected fraud. Both policies are published on the Council's webpage, along with details on how members of the public can report suspected fraud and corruption.

3.4   Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

3.4.1   The Strategy and Partnerships service area is responsible for supporting statutory local partnership arrangements (Health and Wellbeing Board, Safeguarding Adults Board, Multi Agency Safeguarding Children Partnership and Children's Trust) and some non-statutory partnerships such as a new model of collaboration adopted to work with the voluntary and community sector through a network of Thematic Leads across the borough. The Strategic Partnerships team co-ordinates a broad range of collaborative activities, which stem from the Council's engagement with local public, private, voluntary sector organisations and faith groups. The Council incorporates good governance arrangements in respect of partnerships and other joint working and ensures that they are reflected across the authority's overall governance structures.

3.4.2　　At a service area level, the objectives of partnerships are documented in the Service Plans and within contract documentation. They are then reflected in staff's individual objectives.

3.4.3　　Regard to equality, diversity and human rights duties is embedded in the budget setting and business planning process, and templates for each require that officers and members take into consideration in an appropriate manner the equality and diversity impacts of proposed decisions. The Council's approach is to embed equality and diversity within all of its work so that equality considerations are part of day-to-day management. The council has recently adopted a Black Community Action Plan in response to the recent heightened concerns and to address the inequalities that our black communities continue to face. The aims of the plan, which the local community helped us to create, include building sustainable communities, with Black leaders playing a role in decision-making, developing community spaces, that members of the community will run and manage, and conducting an internal review of processes in the council. The plan is on our website:

https://www.brent.gov.uk/neighbourhoods-and-communities/community-priorities/brent-black-community-action-plan#bbcap

3.4.4　　Consultation and engagement with residents, stakeholders and the wider community are integral to the Council's decision-making approach and processes, ensuring that a wide and diverse range of views are heard. A range of methods and techniques are utilised including the Council's Consultation Portal, quarterly Brent Connects public forum and a series of 'Time to Talk' events, as well as participation in engagements led by the voluntary sector. A resident attitude survey is undertaken every 4 or 5 years.

Council, Cabinet and committee meetings are open to the public and most are live streamed. Our complaints outcomes and performance (including Ombudsman finding and compensation paid) are reported to Cabinet as is our performance in respect of requests received under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Subject Access Requests under the Data Protection Act 2018.

3.5　　Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

3.5.1　　The Council has a Borough Plan for the period of 2019 to April 2023 agreed by the Cabinet and Full Council. This document includes the corporate objectives of the Council and our shared partnerships priorities with other public agencies. Key performance indicators which relate to the targets in the plan are monitored on a quarterly and annual basis and reported to CMT and the Cabinet. The Borough Plan references other key relevant documents, such as the Community Engagement Strategy and the Digital Strategy.

3.5.2　　The Borough Plan is available on the staff intranet and will be regularly promoted via Brent Magazine, its website, press releases and targeted campaigns. All new strategies and plans will be underpinned by the Borough Plan's themes and annual priorities – which are consulted on with users and other relevant stakeholders. Departmental Service Plans are discussed annually with Lead Members prior to finalisation.

3.6　　Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

3.6.1　　The Borough Plan is focused on Building a Better Brent. It sets out the Council's vision for 2023, which is to make Brent a borough of culture, empathy and shared prosperity.

It is underpinned by an annual Delivery Plan which identifies the key tasks from which team plans and individual objectives are set.

3.6.2 The vision sets out how the Council will build on the successes achieved to-date while developing a much sharper focus on services designed around the individual and creating better outcomes for those residents with complex circumstances. The plan highlights the need to concentrate resources on the things that matter the most, and use resources in the most effective way. Borough Plan priorities are aligned to both the demographic and economic needs profile of the borough and the findings from the community engagement activities. A programme of activity is in place to support delivery of this vision with reports on progress provided regularly to CMT and elected Councillors.

3.6.3 The Cabinet consider risks as part of their decision-making role on corporate policies, including the annual budget setting processes, major policy decisions and major projects.

3.6.4 The Council's Risk Management Policy and Strategy sets out the general framework for the identification, assessment and management of risks across the Council. It also clearly sets out the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders. Risk management is a key element of the Council's governance framework, and is aligned to the Council's corporate objectives and priorities to help ensure that these and resulting outcomes are achieved. All members and officers have responsibility and a role to play in managing risks. The Council's Strategic Risk Register is reviewed and updated biannually and records the risks that are considered by senior management to be of impact and/or likelihood of materialising and which may have an adverse effect on the achievement of the Council's corporate objectives.

3.6.5 The council has the community engagement framework at its heart enabling us to build trust and understanding with our communities, to create more opportunities to empower residents and to improve the quality and consistency of community engagement practice. The framework enables the council to understand the complex nature of our communities - created flexible models for engagement, acting as a mechanism to create clear outcomes through procreation and position residents to lead design and make decisions.

3.6.6 The framework details for all staff:

- The standards and values of engagement we offer to residents
- guidance on using different methods and techniques
- An internal online resource available to staff
- Best practice advice will be available from the central team
- Collation of existing 'User Voices' to inform council work

3.6.7 The framework provides a toolkit for service areas to enable bespoke development of approaches. These include:

Suitability: choosing the right level of participation for the work in question is important, both in terms of time and effort in planning and implementation but also in ensuring that the outcomes of the engagement meet the needs of the work and that expectations of participants are properly managed.

Accessibility: Regardless of the level of participation that is decided on, it is essential that it is designed and implemented in a way that gives full consideration to any barriers that might exist for residents. Whether this is ensuring that information can be accessed by all or that people have the means or necessary support to effectively contribute.

Quality: All engagement activities should meet a high standard and be fit for purpose, whether that is simply providing residents with information or creating opportunities for full decision making.

3.6.8   In preparing its Borough Plan, the council considers the findings of its Residents Survey and other community consultation as well as the discussion at Forward Together corporate sessions for all staff.

3.7   Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

3.7.1   A full member learning and development programme is in place and there is a comprehensive induction programme for all Councillors within the first few weeks of their election to office. Training on the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors is compulsory. The Council has adopted specific codes of conduct for Councillors involved in planning or licensing decision-making and these Councillors receive additional training in these areas as a pre-condition of their participation. Entitlement to special responsibility allowances for some posts is dependent on mandatory training being attended. It has been agreed that an Acceptable Use Policy will be developed which will provide for potential restriction of access to council systems by Councilors who have not completed the mandatory Data Protection training. A bespoke annual learning and development programme is provided for Councillors appointed as Members or Substitutes on the Scrutiny, Planning and Alcohol and Entertainment Licensing Committees.

3.7.2   We have a comprehensive e-learning offer for knowledge, skills and personal development and various internal training courses. Key initiatives for the next year include a further Middle Manager Development programme cohort, further work to embed succession planning and leadership development. There is a corporate induction programme in place for staff, which is a combination of e-learning and face-to-face activities. Key information and policies are highlighted to new staff and managers and held on the intranet. Regular communication through annual roadshow events and other channels are maintained to advise staff of new learning opportunities. Additionally, our bi-annual 'Forward Together' events, provide an opportunity for staff to come together to engage with issues and opportunities facing the Council as a whole and to understand how their work fits with Council priorities

3.7.3   Departments also design and deliver development programmes specific to their individual needs. For example, in CWB, development exists on three levels. Staff take part in the corporate training and development programme, including mandatory courses. There is also a CWB development programme, which focuses on career development, offering mentoring to staff at all levels; and improving collaborative working through 'Making Every Contact Counts' training programme available to all teams , and 'Leadership for Making Every Contact Counts' a leadership programme for first line managers. Finally, in individual services they have developed Skills Academies to prioritise and deliver service-specific professional training.

3.7.4   The Council has a comprehensive Succession Planning and Leadership programme to develop middle managers and identify those staff who have the potential to attain senior posts. In addition as part of the Black Community Action Plan a series of internal programmes have been developed to ensure those BAME staff have the opportunity play an active role in shaping Council policy.

3.7.5   In December 2021 the Cabinet agreed an investment of £9.3M in its Digital Strategy – 2022 to 2026.The Digital Strategy underpins the Borough Plan supporting the Council and the people of Brent to be digitally confident. From delivering an innovative customer platform where residents can interact with the council to a complete end to end

transformation of the Council's housing services the Digital strategy is ensuring the council remains at the cutting edge of technology and how it's used. In addition, an investment of £4.2M was agreed for a digital support fund for businesses and the provision of devices for digitally excluded households in Brent, helping to tackle digital exclusion.

3.8   **Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management**

3.8.1   Decision making arrangements are set out in the Constitution. The Council operates a Leader and Cabinet model of decision making. Although some decisions are reserved for Full Council, most are made by the Cabinet or by Committees, sub-Committees or officers. In September 2018, individual member decision-making was introduced in a limited number of areas, supported by a governance process similar to that for Cabinet decisions. Cabinet members received a briefing about their new responsibilities and the related processes. The new process has worked well and further powers were delegated by the Leader to Individual Cabinet Members from April 2021.

3.8.2   All forthcoming Key decisions by Cabinet, Cabinet Members, Cabinet Committees or officers are published in the Council's Forward plan published every month on the Council's website.

3.8.3   Reports and minutes of meetings are also published on the Council's website and are available through the Libraries. This includes urgent decisions, which are reported to the next formal meeting of Council.

3.8.4   The Council has an Audit and Standards Advisory Committee which usually meets at least six times during the year, with clear terms of reference and an annual work programme for internal audit, investigations and risk management. The Committee has an independent chair, two co-opted (independent) members in relation to member conduct standards issues and an independent adviser to help ensure it is effective in performing its duties.

3.8.5   In order to enhance the effectiveness of the Committee, it was re-constituted as an advisory Committee for most of its activities. This has enabled the independent Members to be equal voting members of the Committee.

3.8.6   The Council maintains an Internal Audit service that operates in accordance with the published internal audit standards expected of a local authority in the United Kingdom. The Head of Internal Audit reports to the council's Monitoring Officer, and has direct access to the Chief Executive, the Section 151 Officer and the Chair of the Audit Committee and now the Chair of the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee. The Audit and Investigations functions play an important role in helping the organisation deliver its strategic objectives by objectively assessing the adequacy of governance and the management of risks; and providing an objective and evidence based opinion on governance, risk management and internal control.

3.8.7   The Council's Strategic Risk Register is reported to DMTs, CMT and the Audit and Standards Committee twice a year. The report is written in conjunction with risk leads across the Council, and operationally, risk management continues to be embedded through service-level risk management workshops, targeted training sessions and ongoing support. The process is led by the Council's Head of Internal Audit, in consultation with risk owners, DMTs and CMT. The Risk Register articulates the causes and consequences of strategic risks, alongside a summary of controls. The work of Internal Audit, in accordance with its Annual Audit Plan, is directed towards the key risk areas as identified within the register. The work of Internal Audit therefore seeks to provide assurance to the senior management and members that the Council complies

with relevant laws, regulations, internal policies and procedures. Internal Audit provides quarterly updates on delivery of the audit plan to the Audit and Standards Committee.

3.8.8 Robust business continuity management arrangements exist within the Council, with all critical services having business continuity plans in place.

3.8.9 The Council has a Medium Term Financial Strategy, which is reviewed and updated annually as part of the budget setting process to support the achievement of the Council's corporate priorities. The budget and policy framework outlines the process and timetable to be followed each year when setting the Council's budget. The financial management framework includes regular budget monitoring reports to departmental management teams, Council Management Team and Cabinet.

3.8.10 CIPFA's Financial Management (FM) Code aims to embed sound financial management in local authorities. The Council has reviewed those areas where the FM Code requires compliance with existing codes of practice and has determined that the Council is fully compliant in those areas. Where the FM Code advocates a new approach, such as the use a formal Financial Resilience Assessment to determine the robustness of the Council's financial position and its sustainability in the long-term, the Council believes that there is considerable benefit to be had from updating its current arrangements to implement the FM Code's recommended approach. The Council is working to put in place a new MTFS and long term planning process which will cover the whole period of an administration's Borough Plan and beyond. The MTFS and improved service and financial monitoring arrangements will be closely linked to the overarching Borough Plan and the detailed service delivery plans.

3.8.11 The Council has two wholly owned subsidiary companies – i4B Holdings Limited (i4B) and First Wave Housing Limited (FWH). The work of the companies is agreed by the Cabinet through the annual business plan. Progress against delivery is reported to the Council as shareholder/guarantor via a bi-annual meeting and there are also regular reports to the Council's Audit and Standards Advisory Committee. In addition, the work of the companies in delivering Council objectives has been reviewed via the scrutiny process.

3.8.12 FWH is limited by guarantee without share capital. The Board of the Company is chaired by an independent voting Director. The Company has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Council to support the Company's operations. Under the SLA, the Council provides corporate services such as: governance services, financial services, and legal services.

3.8.13 I4B is limited by shares, providing affordable homes for households who might otherwise be housed in temporary accommodation. The Board of the Company is chaired by an independent voting Director. The Company has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Brent to provide a range of services to support the Company's operations such as corporate and financial services; property purchasing and refurbishment and housing management.

3.8.14 The Council also has a Shared Technology Service (STS) covering three Councils (Brent, Lewisham and Southwark). A Joint Committee has been established to discharge executive functions on behalf of the three boroughs, in so far as they relate to joint activities or areas of common concern in relation to the provision of ICT infrastructure and related supporting services. An officer management board is also in place.

3.8.15 The council also has LGA Digital Services, which is a company limited by shares, jointly owned by the Local Government Association. LGA digital was set up in July 2015 to allow Brent to manage the ICT services for the LGA. Board and governance support is provided by the Council Transformation team. The Board of the Company is chaired by

an LGA Head of Service, with remaining members being made up of Council and LGA representatives. Board meetings are held on a quarterly basis

3.9   Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability

3.9.1   Accountability is about ensuring that those making decisions and delivering services are answerable for them. Effective accountability is concerned not only with reporting on actions completed, but also ensuring that stakeholders are able to understand and respond as the organisation plans and carries out its activities in a transparent manner. Both external and internal audit contribute to effective accountability.

3.9.2   The statutory Forward Plan is published monthly on the internet, and details all key decisions proposed to be made by the Council during the relevant period. Any key decision which is not on the Forward Plan may not be taken within that period, unless the report author is able to demonstrate to the Monitoring Officer and relevant members that urgency procedure requirements are met and, where required under Standing Orders, appropriate agreement of the Chief Executive or the relevant Chair of Scrutiny is obtained. All urgent decisions taken are monitored by the Monitoring Officer and regular reports taken to Full Council.

3.9.3   Members are required to make sound decisions based on written reports which are prepared in accordance with the report writing guide and have to be cleared by both Finance and Legal. The Cabinet receives a briefing (Leader's Briefing) three weeks prior to the Cabinet meeting when members can ask detailed technical questions of officers. All reports must be reviewed and signed-off by, or on behalf of, the Director of Finance and the Director of Legal, HR, Audit & Investigations and contain clear financial and legal advice to help members arrive at decisions.

3.9.4   In accordance with the Local Government Act 2000, the Council has mechanisms in place to allow the effective, independent and rigorous examination of the proposals and decisions by the Cabinet. These mechanisms involve the Scrutiny process including call-in. The conduct of the Council's business is governed by the Constitution, which includes Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

3.9.5   All members and chief officers are required to complete an annual statement relating to third party transactions and a register of members' interests, which is updated by members, is maintained and published on the Council's website.

3.9.6   The Brent Council Code of Conduct for Members, reviewed in 2021, defines the standards of conduct expected of elected representatives, based on the principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. Complaints under the Code are reported to the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee as are details of declared Gifts and Hospitality received by members and the mandatory training they have undertaken.

3.9.7   In addition, the following codes, protocols and systems are well established within the Council. All are regularly reviewed and updated to account for developments in governance arrangements and changes in local government.
These include:

> ➢ A declaration of interest process for members and officers as described above;

> ➢ Organisation-wide performance appraisal and employee development schemes are in operation;

➢ There is a corporate complaints procedure in place in line with Ombudsman good practice requirements, and

➢ Whistle-blowing, anti-fraud and anti-corruption / bribery policies are in place and publicised in compliance with the national transparency agenda; senior officers' remuneration is published on the Council website.

4. Review of Effectiveness

4.1 The Governance Framework is subject to on-going review as part of the everyday business of the organisation. The reduction in resources within the public sector has increased the attention on ensuring that governance frameworks remain efficient and effective. The Council also has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a formal review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. This includes group activities where the activities are significant.

4.2 The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the Directors and senior managers within the authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the work of the Head of Internal Audit and Investigation's Annual Report and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

4.3 The Council's review of the effectiveness of its system of internal control is informed by:

➢ Annual Assurance Opinion of the Head of Internal Audit;
➢ Performance against targets;
➢ LGA Peer Review 2021,
➢ External Audit outcomes
➢ Internal Audit outcomes;
➢ Scrutiny arrangements;
➢ Reports from inspectorates;
➢ 2021Performance information;
➢ Risk management arrangements;
➢ Information governance arrangements and
➢ A review of the previous year's Annual Governance Statement.

4.4 The process that has been applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework is described below:

4.4.1 Performance Management

The Council has a Performance Management Framework, overseen by the Corporate Performance Team (CPT), within the Chief Executive's Department. The CPT works with Departmental Management Teams to strategically align all the Council's performance monitoring and reporting and coordinate the production of two main reports:

➢ The Quarterly Performance Report for Cabinet, and
➢ Portfolio Performance Packs

Members play a regular role in performance management, providing challenge to officers. Cabinet receives a report on performance each quarter. Cabinet portfolio holders have regular meetings with Strategic Directors and review finance and performance indicators.

4.4.2 Management

The Council Management team meets fortnightly to oversee the operations of the organisation and receives reports for both challenge and comment prior to formal decision-making processes. Reports will also be presented to provide the required assurances regarding the strategic risks the organisation faces. These include periodic reports from the groups and boards established in the identified high risk areas such as Health and Safety; IT Governance; Business Continuity; Corporate Risk, Information Governance and the Commissioning and Procurement Board. The role and contribution that these groups make is reviewed on an on-going basis.

4.4.3 The Cabinet

The Cabinet makes key decisions in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework. It conducts joint planning sessions with the Council Management Team to consider the Council's policy priorities and its linkages with the medium term financial strategy. The Cabinet meets regularly with the Council Management Team to develop policy and to receive operational and financial performance information.

4.4.4 Scrutiny Committees

In 2016, Full Council approved a new structure for scrutiny at Brent Council. This was to replace the Scrutiny Committee with the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee and the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee. Each of the Committees has discrete responsibilities for scrutinising the Council's executive and covers different parts of the local authority's services. Policy is reviewed by reports discussed at Committee as well as task groups set up to review a particular issue. In addition, a Budget panel, which is chaired by the chair of Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee, was set up. In addition, there is scrutiny of Cabinet members and decision-making at individual Committee meetings of the two Committees. The two Committees have a statutory role in scrutinising policy and decision-making of external organisations and agencies.

4.4.5 The Audit and Standards Advisory Committee

The Audit and Standards Advisory Committee met five times during 2021/22 and has considered the work of Internal Audit during the year, the Head of Internal Audit's annual report and opinion and the External Auditor's annual audit letter. The Committee monitors the effective development and operation of risk management. It reviews the annual statement of accounts specifically to consider whether appropriate accounting policies have been followed and whether there are concerns arising from the financial statements or from audits that need to be brought to the attention of the Council. The Audit and Standards Advisory Committee also considers the Treasury Management Strategy and the Annual Investment Strategy and reviews treasury management activity during the year. The Committee is also responsible for a number of matters related to member conduct and has received reports concerning these during the year.

Those matters which come before the Committee which require a formal exercise of Council functions (e.g. approval of accounts) will continue to be made by the Audit and Standards Committee, which will consist of the Councillor membership of the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee.

An exercise has been undertaken to consider the complementary roles of the Scrutiny Committees and the Audit and Standards Committees and how they can best work together. Meetings have taken place between the Chairs of these bodies with a view to considering common issues and co-ordinating forward agenda planning to ensure issues are considered in the appropriate meeting and relevant intelligence is shared between them.

4.4.6   Corporate Governance Group

Set up in 2016, this is an informal, but significant, meeting of the Council's three corporate Statutory Officers together with the Head of Audit and Investigations and the Independent Adviser to the Audit & Standards Advisory Committee. It reviews key governance issues, the results of recent sensitive investigations and similar material in order to update policy and practice as appropriate.

4.4.7   Internal Audit

The Council receives assurance about the effectiveness of the corporate governance, internal control and risk management arrangements from the work of Internal Audit which provides independent and objective assurance across the whole range of the Council's activities. It is the duty of the Head of Audit and Investigations to give an opinion, at least annually, on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control within the Council. This opinion has been used to inform the Annual Governance Statement.

The Head of Audit and Investigations produces an annual report which will be presented to the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee. This report will outline the key findings of the audit work undertaken during 2021/22.

An external quality assessment (EQA) of the Internal Audit Service carried out during 2018/19, concluded that the Service conformed to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The outcome reflected a professional and successful Internal Audit service commanding a good level of respect and credibility across the Council and seen as a key part in supporting and developing good governance within the Council. The next EQA is scheduled for Q4 2022-23.

It is the opinion of the Head of Audit and Investigations that, taking into account all available evidence from audit work undertaken in 2021/22, there is reasonable assurance over the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's overall framework of governance, risk management and control during the financial year 2020/21. Internal Audit did not review all of the wider governance mechanisms described in this report however there was no evidence to suggest any deficiencies in the arrangements described by senior stakeholders in this statement.

4.4.8   External Audit

Grant Thornton UK LLP is the Council's appointed external auditor. As well as an examination of the Council's financial statements, the work of the Council's external auditor includes an assessment of the arrangements the Council have in place to deliver value for money in its use of resources.

The Council ensures that it provides timely support, information and responses to external audit and properly considers audit findings and recommendations.

4.4.9   Risk Management

The Council managed its risks during 2021/22 in accordance with the Risk Management Policy and Strategy. The Corporate Management Team formally considers strategic risks, with quarterly reports also being presented to the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee. Risk management is a key element of the Council's governance framework, and is aligned to the Council's corporate objectives and priorities to help ensure that these and resulting outcomes are achieved. Enhancements continue to be made to the Council's risk management framework, where deemed necessary and appropriate to do so. As part of the enhancements made in 2021/22, risk sponsors have now been

assigned for each strategic risk, who will be accountable for the risk mitigating actions and controls. The risk impact matrix has also been expanded to help consider, identify and articulate the impact of risks across a number of factors, including financial, service delivery, health and safety and reputational impacts.

4.4.10 Developing Capacity

The Council has operated procedures during the period covered by this statement to ensure the training needs of staff are assessed against core competencies and any key training needs are met. Additionally, the Council has provided and makes available ongoing training opportunities to Councillors to enable them to effectively fulfil their duties.

4.4.11 Engagement

Regular consultation is also undertaken with residents to ensure that the authority makes decisions based on resident requirements and feedback regarding general provision and quality of service.

5. Significant Governance Issues

The CIPFA/SOLACE Governance Framework identifies the following as issues that constitute significant governance issues:

- The issue has seriously prejudiced or prevented achievement of a principal objective;
- The issue has resulted in a need to seek additional funding to allow it to be resolved;
- The issue has resulted in significant diversion of resources from another aspect of the business;
- The issue has led to a material impact on the accounts;
- The Audit Committee, or equivalent, has advised that it should be considered significant for this purpose, or
- The Head of Internal Audit has reported on it as significant in the annual opinion on the internal control environment.

 During 2021/22, no significant governance issues were identified.

6. Conclusion and Evaluation

As Leader and Chief Executive, we have been advised of the implications of the results of the review of the effectiveness of the Council's governance framework.

Our overall assessment is that this Annual Governance Statement is a balanced reflection of the governance environment and that an adequate framework exists within Brent Council to ensure effective internal control is maintained.

We are also satisfied that there are appropriate plans in place to address any weaknesses and ensure continuous improvement in the system of internal control.

Signed:

…………………………………… 　　　　　 ………………………………………..
Muhammed Butt 　　　　　　　　　　 **Carolyn Downs**
Leader of the Council 　　　　　　　　　 Chief Executive

Date:
…………………………………… 　　　　　 ………………………………………..