



COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2025

Late Item(s)

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Public
Key Decision - No

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter:	Annual Report of the Corporate Governance Committee
Meeting/Date:	Council – 15 October 2025
Executive Portfolio:	Councillor J Harvey - Executive Councillor for Governance and Democratic Services
Report by:	Chair of the Corporate Governance Committee 2024//25
Ward(s) affected:	All Wards

Executive Summary:

The Committee presents an annual report to the Council on the work that it has undertaken each year.

The draft annual report in respect of the 2024/25 is attached at Appendix 1. It has been prepared by Councillor Michael Burke, who was Chair of the Corporate Governance Committee during the period covered by the report. It summarises the work undertaken by the Committee during 2024/25 together with any issues that relate to the year.

If, after considering the draft report, the Committee wish to make any changes, it is proposed that the Chair be given authority to agree any amendments. The report will be presented to the next Full Council meeting.

The report will be uploaded onto the Council's website once it has been approved.

Recommendation(s):

- 1. It is recommended that the Council receive and note the Corporate Governance Committee 2024/25 Annual Report.**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This is an annual report of the Committee which summarises the work it has undertaken during 2024/25 and any issues that arose in the year.
- 1.2 Once the draft report is approved by Committee it will be presented by the Chair of Committee at Council.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Committee is required to discharge the functions of the Council in relation to both the corporate governance of the Council and the conduct of elected Members. This annual report sets to inform Council of the activities Committee has undertaken in discharging these functions.
- 2.2 It has been prepared by the Chair of the Corporate Governance Committee during the period covered by the report. It details matters that have been considered together with membership and attendance throughout the year.

3. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 3.1 Committee is required to review the draft report and approve that it is an accurate representation/reflection of the year.

4. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 - Corporate Governance Committee: Chair's Annual Report to Council for the year ending 26 March 2025

CONTACT OFFICER

Name/Job Title: Sharon Russell-Surtees, Chief Finance Officer & Deputy S151
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Corporate Governance Committee

Chair's Annual Report to Council

for the year ending 26th March 2025

Introduction by the Chair of the Corporate Governance Committee

This report summarises both the Committee's activities during 2024/25 and issues that arose in that financial year. It is intended to:

- Reassure the Council and other stakeholders that the committee is undertaking its responsibilities properly and in a way that allows it to exercise effective oversight; and
- Demonstrate to the District's residents and other stakeholders the importance that the Council places on good governance, openness and probity in public life. The report sets out the contribution the Committee makes to achieving those aims. The Committee's meetings are open to the public and its report are available on the Council's website.

Over the last year, the Committee has continued its focus on the following key issues:

1. Significant progress has been made by the Council against the backstop, with the following Statement of Accounts being published in advance of the date mandated by the Government: 2022/23, 2023/24. At the point of publication, the 2024/25 Accounts are on track to be published ahead of the backstop date of 27 February 2026.
2. Substantial work on the enhanced review and implementation of internal audit actions has taken place which has been supplemented by a refined approach to action reporting.
3. The updated Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Strategy, and the Annual Review of Fraud Investigation Activity.
4. Continued progress in resolving issues raised in previous Annual Governance Statements.
5. To continually review, challenge and enhance the controls necessary to deal with cyberattacks and to manage Cloud services effectively.

Since the publication of the English Devolution White Paper in December 2024, the Committee has naturally factored Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) into its deliberations. LGR will remain a central consideration shaping the Committee's ongoing work.

Once again, the Committee has maintained its focus on the risks that exist for the organisation. The vital role that Internal Audit plays in assessing the standard of management of these Risks has continued and has been underpinned by the appointment of a Risk Manager, who joined the organisation earlier this month. The Risk Manager will assist the organisation in further enhancing its risk management approach.

The Committee has continued to request updates on the Corporate Risk Register at each meeting, and the ongoing scrutiny of risk in the context of Audit remains a key objective of the Committee going forward. The rationalised Corporate Risk Register has enabled the Committee to focus on risk management in a structured and strategic manner.

To this end, the Chair and Vice Chair have continued to work with the Executive Councillors and Senior Officers to improve the Council's effectiveness in Risk management, and the role that the Corporate Governance Committee can play in this. This work has been undertaken with oversight from RSM, who have also fulfilled the role of Head of Internal Audit.

The Chair and Vice Chair took part in the review of the LGA Audit Peer Challenge in March 2024. The Committee will recall that one of the recommendations related to the appointment of a Monitoring Officer. The new Monitoring Officer joined the organisation on 30 June 2025 and now attends the Corporate Governance Committee. The Chair has met with the Monitoring Officer and looks forward to the Committee working collaboratively with the postholder to further strengthen and refine the Council's governance framework.

The Committee will recall the Government's stated intention to require local government audit committees to include one or more Independent non-voting members. The Committee have greatly valued the contributions of Phillip Webb as our independent member.

Finally, I would like to thank those Officers who have supported the Committee's activities over the Corporate year 2024-25; the Members who served on the Committee during the Corporate year, and in particular, Members for their contributions to the Committee's oversight of all aspects of Corporate Governance.

Councillor Michael Burke

Chair, Corporate Governance Committee

September 2025

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

YEAR ENDED MARCH 2025

This is the report to Council of the Corporate Governance Committee to summarise activities undertaken during 2024/25 demonstrating compliance with the *CIPFA Audit Committee Position Statement 2022 (CACPS)*, discharging its responsibilities and providing an assessment of its performance.

The CACPS sets out the purpose, model, core functions and membership of the Corporate Governance committee (CGC). It details outputs that must be established and evidenced:

- Purpose of CGC.
- Independent and effective model.
- Core functions, including specific responsibilities for:
 - Maintenance of governance, risk and control arrangements.
 - Financial and governance reporting.
 - Establishing appropriate and effective arrangements for audit and assurance.
- Audit committee membership.
- Engagement and outputs.
- Impact.

These areas are explored in the following report and the activities and achievements noted.

1. Purpose of CGC

The committee's purpose is to provide an independent and high-level focus on the adequacy of governance, risk and control arrangements. Its role in ensuring there is sufficient assurance over governance, risk and control gives greater confidence to all those charged with governance that those arrangements are effective.

The committee has oversight of both internal and external audit, together with the financial and governance reports, helping to ensure there are adequate arrangements in place for both internal challenge and public accountability.

The committee is also tasked with receiving reports from the Constitution Review Working Group, which last met in July of this year with agenda items covering the following:

- The Council Procedures Rules
- Consideration of the implementation of substitutes at committees
- The Scheme of Delegation
- Consideration of the management of opposition budgets.

Whilst the work of the Constitution Review Working Group took place outside of the reporting period for this annual report, the committee consider that it is important to note that it will be receiving items on the above topics in due course.

2. Independent and Effective Model

The Committee is an apolitical, non decision-making forum; it is an advisory committee that has sufficient importance in the authority, so that its recommendations and opinions carry weight and have influence with the leadership team and those charged with governance. It is directly accountable to Council and is independent of the scrutiny and executive functions but has rights of access to and engagement with other committees or functions.

3. Core Functions

3.1. Maintenance of governance, risk and control arrangements.

The Committee considers updates from the organisation on the operation of its governance, risk and control arrangements. During 2024/25, this included:

- Receiving regular updates on the organisation's Corporate Risk register, debating the risks included upon it, the mitigating actions proposed to control exposure to adverse impacts should those risks materialise and recommending further areas for consideration.
- Monitoring actions arising from Internal Audit reviews and receiving updates on actions not implemented by the agreed target dates.
- Reviewing new policies and policy updates and recommending these for approval to Council.
- Receiving and noting the Annual Review of Fraud Investigation activity report.
- Receiving and noting the Annual Complaints report.
- Receiving an update on the organisation's compliance with the Information Rights Act and Information Governance.
- Considering a report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager on the Code of Conduct and Register of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.
- Receiving an update on Cyber Security.
- Reviewing a Community Governance Review – Glatton & Conington Parishes.
- Receiving a report on Future Internal Audit Provision.
Reviewing an Inspection Report Update on Use of Surveillance Under the Regulations of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA).
- Ongoing meetings of the Constitutional Working Group.

3.2. Financial and governance reporting.

As set out above, significant progress has been made by the Council against the backstop, with the Statement of Accounts for 2022/23 and 2023/24 being published in advance of the date mandated by the Government. The 2024/25 Accounts are on track to be approved on 25 September 2025, which will allow them to be formally signed ahead of the backstop date of 27 February 2026.

The organisation's external auditors regularly attend the meetings of the committee and in September 2025 specifically to present the External Auditor's Annual Report for 2024/2025. Committee members were able to ask questions of the External Auditors.

The Committee have had oversight of the disclaimed opinion on the accounts, a challenge which is affecting many other Councils, due to the continued work to restore the whole external audit system.

3.3. Establishing appropriate and effective arrangements for audit and assurance

The Committee is tasked with reviewing and approving the Internal Audit Charter on an annual basis alongside the Annual Internal Audit Plan. The Charter defines the purpose, authority and responsibility of Internal Audit activity, establishes the Internal Audit Service's position within the organisation; authorises access to records, personnel and physical properties relevant to the performance of engagements; and defines the scope of internal audit activities.

The Annual Internal Audit Plan details the expected activities for the Internal Audit Team over the coming year and is based upon the outputs of the Risk Management Strategy. It aims to be able to provide assurance that the controls in place to protect the organisation are deployed effectively and monitored regularly.

The following Internal Audit activity was undertaken as part of the 2024/25 internal audit plan, and confirmed to Committee:

Assignment (2024/25 Internal Audit Plan)	Executive lead	Opinion issued	Actions agreed		
			L	M	H
One Leisure, Pool Operation Records	Corporate Director (Communities)	Limited Assurance	0	2	2
Review of Commercial Estates rent review processes and invoicing	Director of Finance and Corporate Resources	Limited Assurance	1	2	2
Code of Procurement	Director of Finance and Corporate Resources	Limited Assurance	0	3	4
Key Financial Controls	Director of Finance and Corporate Resources	Limited Assurance	7	4	2
Home and Hybrid Working	Chief Executive Officer	Advisory –	3	9	2
		some significant issues			

Cyber Essentials Readiness Assessment - DRAFT	Chief Digital and Information Officer	Advisory – some significant issues	2	6	2
Budget Management; financial sustainability	Director of Finance and Corporate Resources	Reasonable Assurance	0	6	0
Operations Vehicle Maintenance Processes	Chief Executive Officer	Reasonable Assurance	0	5	0
Green Bin Implementation and transfer to BAU operations	Corporate Director (Communities)	Reasonable Assurance	0	3	0
Committee Structure Governance	Director of Finance and Corporate Resources	Reasonable Assurance	3	5	0
Follow Up of Management Actions	Director of Finance and Corporate Resources	Reasonable Progress	2	1	0
Minor works follow up	Corporate Director (Communities)	No opinion - Advisory	0	3	0
DFG Grant Verification	Director of Finance and Corporate Resources	No opinion - Advisory	0	0	0
Total			18	49	14

The Committee receives regular reports on the completion of audit actions, in particular, actions which are not implemented by the agreed due date. The reports to Committee update on the reasons for non-implementation and the work being undertaken to achieve completion. The Committee has noted that the Internal Audit function has been on a significant journey of change over the last year, with RSM undertaking the function since January 2025. The Committee have noted the work undertaken by Officers to enhance the reporting on Internal Audit Actions.

4. Engagement and outputs

During 2024/25 the committee met on seven occasions. Committee meetings were regularly attended by the Internal Audit Manager (covered by RSM since January 2025), the Corporate Director for Finance and Resources, the Chief Executive and other officers as required. The Chair and Vice Chair were able to meet the officers outside of Committee as required.

The organisation's external auditors regularly attended committee meetings on to discuss audit planning and progress.

5. Audit Committee Membership

The terms of reference for the committee were reviewed in March 2024 to ensure CIPFA's requirements for an audit committee were met. Whilst CIPFA's model terms of reference was used as a basis for the review, the committee's terms of reference also include responsibility for Constitutional, Conduct and Regulatory Arrangements. The review included a proposal to reduce the committee membership to seven members plus up to two independent members. This was agreed at Council in April 2024.

One independent non-voting member was recruited and approved to committee in May 2024, to complement the skills of the existing committee members.

6. Impact

As part of the LGA Peer Review of Internal Audit, the committee was asked to consider its role in the organisation's governance and assurance processes, and suggestions made for change, such as:

- Reviewing membership committee size and membership.
- Recruiting Independent Members.
- Reviewing its Terms of Reference
- Assessing its skills and considering areas for improvement through training.

As already noted, these have all been undertaken during the year and the committee now more closely aligns itself with CIPFA's Audit Committee Position Statement 2022.