



City of
Doncaster
Council

**DRAFT
ANNUAL GOVERNANCE
STATEMENT
2023/24**

Introduction

This statement explains how City of Doncaster Council (the Council) has complied and meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, regulation 6 (b), which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an Annual Governance Statement.

Scope of responsibility

City of Doncaster Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law, and proper standards, that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for. The Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements that ensure, secure and continue improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, including arrangements for the management of risk whilst demonstrating a commitment to openness and acting in the public interest at all times.

The Council has approved and adopted a local code of corporate governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government'. This document defines standards of behaviour for members and staff, as well as including policies that deal with whistleblowing and conflicts of interest, all of which are effectively communicated to relevant colleagues. A copy of the Council's Corporate Code of Governance is on our website at www.doncaster.gov.uk or can be obtained from The Policy, Insight and Change Team, 01302 862533

The purpose of the governance framework

The governance framework comprises of systems and processes culture, and values by which we are directed and controlled, and through which we account to, engage with and lead our communities. It enables us to monitor the achievements of our strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led us to deliver appropriate services that are value for money.

The Council's system of internal control is a significant part of our 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. Our system of internal controls is based on an ongoing process, designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of our policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood and potential impact of those risks being realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

Whilst the AGS considers the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024, it must also reflect any significant events or developments relating to the Council's governance system that have occurred between the year-end and the date on which the Statement of Accounts will be signed off (November 2024)

Financial Management Code

Strong financial management is an essential part of ensuring public sector finances are sustainable. The CIPFA Financial Management Code (FM Code) provides guidance for good and sustainable financial management in local authorities and assurance that authorities are managing resources effectively. The FM Code identifies risks to financial sustainability and provides a framework of assurance, including the CIPFA Financial Resilience Index which is a comparative analytical tool that shows the council's position on a range of measures associated with financial risk.

Complying with the standards set out in the FM Code is the collective responsibility of elected members, the Chief Finance Officer and their professional colleagues in the leadership team. Complying with the FM Code will help strengthen the framework that surrounds financial decision making.

The Council undertakes an annual assessment of compliance with the principles of the FM code and picks up any actions as part of quarterly performance management. This assessment has confirmed the Council's compliance, with some actions identified for further improvement which have been reported and agreed with management.

Our Governance Framework

The Council's executive arrangements and the oversight of its functions ensures strong political, strategic, and partnership leadership arrangements. We have a clearly visible golden thread linking our partnership wide Borough Strategy (Doncaster Delivering Together) priorities into our Corporate and Service Plans as well as our Performance Development Review process. Our Borough Strategy highlights the vision for the Council and its partners, and the intended outcomes for citizens and service users. It is used as a basis for our service plans and establishes clear channels of communication with all sections of our communities and other stakeholders, ensuring accountability and encouraging open consultation.

The Council has effective arrangements in place for the discharge of the Head of Paid Service function, the Chief Financial Officer S151 function, and the Monitoring Officer function in their roles as the Council's Statutory Officers. Where necessary induction arrangements include tailored introductions to the council's structure, decision making arrangements for officers and members who are new to the council or the Senior Leadership Team, and information on key policies and procedures.

The City of Doncaster Council's Audit Committee (the Committee) is a key component of the Council's Corporate Governance providing an independent and high-level focus on the audit, assurance, and reporting arrangements that underpin good governance and financial standards.

The purpose of the Audit Committee is to provide independent assurance to the Members on the adequacy of the risk management framework and the internal control environment. It provides an independent review of the Council's governance, risk management, and control frameworks as well as overseeing the financial reporting and annual governance processes. It oversees both internal audit and external audit, helping to ensure efficient and effective assurance arrangements are in place.

The Committee has a programme of work in place to ensure it fulfils its responsibilities and has overseen and supported positive progress in a number of areas during the year, including:

- Helping to maintain and improve the Council's system of risk, governance and control by reviewing internal and external audit work carried out during the year; This includes ensuring for Internal Audit that assurance arrangements conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the role of the Head of Internal Audit (2019) and that the Internal Audit function operates to their relevant professional standards which are the United Kingdom Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The Committee received this assurance independently in 2022 through the External Quality Assessment carried out by the Head of Internal Audit from Rotherham Council who assessed Doncaster's Internal Audit team to be operating at the highest level of conformance with these standards. For this year that assurance is provided by a self assessments by the Head of Internal Audit;
- Supporting improvement in the Council's control arrangements by ensuring appropriate action is taken to implement management actions arising from audit recommendations and calling officers to account where explanations over any lack of progress are required;
- Critically assessing the Council's governance arrangements and supporting the production of an Annual Governance Statement;
- Supporting the maintenance of the good standards achieved in producing the Council's Statement of Accounts;
- Supporting the Council's antifraud, bribery and corruption arrangements and noting low incidents of fraud and error area as set out in the annual fraud report. This was especially important this year again with the cost of living crisis heightening fraud risk.
- Ensuring the Council's surveillance policies are kept up to date and reviewing surveillance carried out by the Council;
- The committee has continued to be actively engaged with the Head of Internal Audit and other officers during this period to understand the nature and depth of challenges relevant to the committee.

The Audit Committee produces an Annual Report, which is available [doncaster.gov.uk](https://www.doncaster.gov.uk)

Governance Group

This Group, which is chaired by the Monitoring Officer, leads on the development of governance arrangements at the Council and ensures that it complies with relevant laws and regulations, internal policies, and procedures, and that expenditure is lawful and conforms to best practice guidance issued by CIPFA / SOLACE and any other sector-leading advice.

Role of Internal and External Audit

The City of Doncaster Council has both internal and external auditors. Internal Audit and External Audit aim to co-ordinate their work to get best value from the resources available and aim to work closely together to achieve the Council's objectives.

The role of Internal Audit is to:

- give independent assurance over the Council's risk, governance and control arrangements
- alert managers to areas of potential weakness and to agree management actions for improvements
- give unbiased professional advice on policies, procedures, practices and systems

All councils are subject to ongoing scrutiny by External Audit and their role is to:

- give an opinion on the Council and group's financial statements
- assess the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources (the value for money review)
- audit specified grant claims required for various Government Departments

Grant Thornton were appointed as External Auditors and issued their Auditor's Annual Report on the findings from their Value for Money arrangements review in January 2024. There were no significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements noted from their Value for Money work. This is consistent with the opinions provided in previous years. Internal Audit were able to provide a positive opinion in their annual report for 2023-24, which alongside the good value for money findings, indicates there are sound risk, governance, and control arrangements in place.

Overall, the Grant Thornton Annual Audit Report was an extremely positive one as it has been in previous years and with the "unqualified audit opinion", recognising the ongoing strong arrangements within the Council in preparing the Statement of Accounts for audit. The quality of the working papers and the supporting information has improved year-on-year with the working papers, once again, meeting the standards specified in the Accounts Audit Protocol with a clear audit trail provided. Responses to audit queries were also provided in a timely manner.

The 2022/23 audit started after the unaudited accounts have been published by 31st May 2023. Grant Thornton concluded their audit of the accounts by the 30th November 2023 and the Auditor's Annual Report on Value for Money arrangements were reported to the 1st February 2024 Audit Committee.

Our Approach to Risk Management

The Council recognises that risk management is an integral part of good governance and management practice.

Managing the Council's risks effectively contributes to the delivery of the strategic and operational objectives of the authority. The Council manages risks via a Risk Management Framework that has been designed to provide structure and guidance to support our organisation, and the individuals within it, to take positive risks in an informed way.

Review of effectiveness

The City of Doncaster Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The Policy Insight and Change team led the Annual Governance review.

The review of the Council's effectiveness is derived from two perspectives, corporate and service perspectives. The corporate perspective is taken from existing intelligence provided by colleagues holding a key governance position within the authority including the Head of Internal Audit, the Caldicott Guardian, Senior Information Risk Owner, Section 151 Officer, and Monitoring Officer. The current strategic risk register, financial resilience statement and complaints received are also reviewed. The service area perspective, including that of key partner organisations, is provided by each of the Council's Heads of Service, via a series of governance statements, in the form of a self-assessment and other information provided. The individual statements are reviewed, and an overall declaration provided by the relevant Assistant Director, which is then summarised to create a single return for the Director to review and update as required.

The Council has been advised on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by its Executive Board and Audit Committee, and that these arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework. The areas already addressed, and those to be specifically addressed, with new actions planned are outlined on the following pages.

The Council's governance arrangements have continued to hold strong and its administration arrangements remained effective during these continued unprecedented times. The Council has maintained adherence to its Financial Procedure Rules and Contract Procedure Rules and other governance related procedures such as urgent decision making.

Effectiveness of arrangements and level of assurance

As the economic challenges continued throughout 2023-24, with the 'cost of living' crisis and the inflationary pressures we saw the impacts across the organisation with the increase in energy, fuel, material, and service delivery. Throughout all this the Council's governance arrangements have yet again held strong and were effective, allowing it to be both flexible and confident in responding to emerging priorities and adapting to service delivery. The Council continues to follow CIPFA guidance incorporating the published updates to produce the Annual Governance Statement. Again, despite the challenges of the 2023-24 year, the Council believes that it can give a reasonable and soundly based level of assurance over these conclusions.

Significant governance issues identified in 2023-24

Whilst we are satisfied with the effectiveness of corporate governance arrangements and systems of internal control, as part of our continued efforts to improve governance the following new issues have been identified for improvement as part of the 2023-24 Annual Governance Statement process:

ISSUE: Assurance Over Future Financial Sustainability of the Council

As seen nationally, the Councils general fund budget continues to be heavily impacted by cost pressures, including the impact of inflation, both pay and contract price inflation. Service pressures continue to be experienced across the Council, in particular for Children's Social Care due to an increase in the complexity of children presenting, market challenges and a range of factors which are impacting on the ability to deliver the budgeted savings. In addition, there are increasing pressures on Adults Social Care budgets during 2023/24 due to a larger number of people being supported in care homes than has been budgeted and higher increases in care home costs for adults of working age than anticipated. Although a break-even position is forecast for 2023/24, there are several ongoing pressures, which are offset by one-off income/savings.

The ongoing pressures have been considered and incorporated into the 2024/25 budget and Medium-term Financial Strategy (MTFS). To achieve a balanced budget for the three-year period, there are savings targets which are challenging for delivery, especially during the cost of living crisis. 20% of the savings have been categorised as being the most difficult to deliver, the majority of which relate to Asset Rationalisation, Regenerative Council, Directorate Savings to be identified and Waste Collection. To mitigate the significant financial risks, greater savings are targeted to be delivered in 2024/25, with the overall aim to achieve a balanced budget over the period of the MTFS and provide sufficient flexibility to respond and meet the financial impact.

In addition, there are increasing concerns in relation to the Dedicated Schools Block - High Needs Block. The in-year financial commitments exceed the annual allocation and the quantum of unfunded expenditure being carried forward is significant. As such, this matter is considered in more detail, in the next item, with appropriate actions.

It is also worth highlighting the difficulties in managing service delivery, with the continuation of one-off specific grant allocations in year from government, in many cases with extremely tight deadlines and additional bureaucracy, for in some cases low values. There are also several mainstream services, including permanent staffing resource, which are funded from one-off grant income, which if the income were to be removed or reduce would adversely impact on the delivery of vital services, presenting a future sustainability risk.

Actions:

- We will review the 2023/24 outturn position and consider the potential impact of any adverse variances on the 2024/25 budget, including identifying mitigating actions. **(30th April 2024)**
- During 2024/25 we will continue to closely monitor and manage the impact of the cost pressures, maintaining specific focus on

Completion

Date:
March 2025

the key areas of risk including Adults and Children’s Social Care and the delivery of specific budget savings.

- We will also continue to focus on the main sources of income e.g. income from council tax and business rates.
- As part of the 2025/26 budget setting process, we will review any additional pressures identified, the impact on the MTFS, including identifying mitigating actions, for approval by Council in February 2025.

Responsible Officer:

Debbie Hogg – Director of Corporate Resources

Faye Tyas – Assistant Director of Finance and Technology

ISSUE: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion, the impact on the Dedicated Schools Grant – High Needs Block & consequential financial risk.

Doncaster continues to experience challenges around SEND and Inclusion linked to several key issues predominantly driven by national policy. These financial pressures have been created by a number of factors; continued financial pressures within school budgets, rising demand for statutory Education Health Care Plan (EHP) assessments, insufficient funding to meet increased demand, insufficient capacity within Doncaster Council special school estate and the external provider market.

Nationally, Education, Health and Care plans (EHP) has increased by 115% since 2014, and by 9% in 2022 alone. One of the consequences of this has been the increasing need of Local Authorities to make placements in Independent Non-Maintained special schools (The national special school population has increased by 53% since 2014, whilst the number in non-maintained special schools has increased by 81%).

By the end of March 2023, the majority of councils carried a cumulative high needs deficit, with a likely national deficit of £3.6 billion by March 2025 (LGA). The amplification of parental choice under the 2015 Act has meant that SEND Tribunals usually consider the primacy of the ‘parents right to choose’ but do not consider efficient and proportionate use of resource. Councils have a 2% success rate in tribunals related to provision.

In Doncaster there are significant cost pressures on services which are funded from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs Block. The forecast outturn position for 2023/24 at quarter 3 is a £7.4m overspend, which results in an overall overspend on DSG forecast of £27.2m by 31st March 2024.

Between 01/02/2018 and 01/02/2019 we saw 362 requests to assess additional support, using the same timeframe for 2023/24 this had risen to 758 requests, an increase of 109%. At the end of the 2018/19 financial year, Doncaster maintained a total of 1898 Education Health Care Plans (EHCP’s), and by the beginning of February 2024 this had increased to 2718, a 43% increase. This has placed pressures on local services and has contributed to significant levels of challenge around high needs spending. The main areas of overspend are Out of Authority placements, Specialist Post 16 Institutions, Education Health & Care plan (EHCP’s) top up payments and additional top up payments to special schools and pupil referral units as well as for alternative provision and tuition.

The Department for Education has created two schemes aimed at reducing high needs deficits in local areas; the Safety Valve (targeted at those with the highest spending trajectories), where financial support is provided in response to local improvements in efficiencies and the 'Delivering Better Value' scheme where grant funding supports the strategy for improving local systems. There are currently 37 councils in the Safety Valve scheme and Doncaster is one of 55 in the 'Delivering Better Value' programme. In most areas the factors driving up high needs spending are deep rooted and complex. The Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee report on Local authorities (March 24), acknowledges that 'While we appreciate that some efficiencies may be achievable, it is not realistic to expect local authorities to manage down deficits of the scale of many billions of pounds over a period of two or three years'.

Doncaster's 'Delivering Better Value' analysis identified how costs are created by iniquities in practice and resource allocation within our mainstream sector. Our plan, therefore, has a clear focus on cost prevention in mainstream schools in order to offset unnecessary use of DSG. Based on modelling the Council have identified potential additional savings of c.£2m per annum from September 2025. However, assuming these savings are delivered, also considering the anticipated funding allocations, the Council is still forecasting an in-year deficit each year, with the overall DSG balance increasing to £48m by the end of 2026/27, (which is significantly below the original projection from Newtons/ CiPFA of £82.5m).

At present there is a statutory override in place regarding the overspend until April 2026. The significant overspend and continued forecast increase is common to other Council positions. In addition, the Council has produced a DSG Management plan which is subject to scrutiny from the DfE and CiPFA and has received positive feedback from the DfE on its saving plans to reduce the deficit. However, this remains a significant financial sustainability risk for the Council. Should the statutory override be removed in April 2026, the Council would be unable to carry forward the balance and would need to fund the remaining deficit. The Council has sufficient reserves to fund the current balance, however, would not be able to meet the forecast balance at the end of March 2026 of £43m. It also recognised that using Council reserves to meet the DSG deficit would reduce the financial resilience of the Council and impact on activities planned.

Our strategic response to this challenge has been developed and delivered through sustained partnership engagement, has been signed off by partners and approved by the DfE. The SEND Board reflects the full range of partnership interests, including school leaders, practitioners, and families. Parent views are collected through twice yearly surveys, our 'Making a Difference' and Co-Production groups and open surgeries with the Director and Assistant Director of Children's services. Our Children and Young People's Shadow Board monitor strategic progress and feed views into the SEND Board. The partnership governance is well established, and appropriate escalations are exercised.

Actions:	Completion Date:
<p>Improving value in the school system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have developed clear expectations as to how schools and settings identify and meet need at every stage. Funding will be allocated upon a proven level of need, without the need for an EHCP. These new procedures will be in place from September 24 and are anticipated to reduce the level of demand for EHCPs and will prevent unnecessary escalations to DSG resources. We are revising local agreement for 'notional' SEND funding in schools which will require schools to use more of school budgets to meet SEND needs without resort to high Needs Block resources (from 8% of school budgets to 11%). We are retraining SEND outreach services to scrutinise and moderate accuracy and effectiveness of school practices. The council School Improvement team are reviewing how SEND funding is deployed in each school to ensure that schools make better use of school budgets before requesting additional resources from DSG – High Needs Block. Training is being provided for all schools and wider professionals to intervene at the earliest point and use universal resources more effectively. 	<p>September 24.</p> <p>Consultation April 24 Implementation April 25. June 24</p> <p>April 24</p> <p>May 24</p>
<p>Improving Sufficiency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our 'Equitable and Inclusive Education' paper (November 23) sets out how we will reduce costs by 20% over 3 years by introducing more local specialist placements through the extension of preventative alternative provisions and Social Emotional Mental Health Hubs (SEMH) The second wave of sufficiency planning will extend our local enhanced resource provision, with associated additional cost prevention of c £4.5m p.a. from April 25. 	<p>April 24</p> <p>Approval June 24, Implementation up to April 25</p>
<p>Improving efficiency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are strengthening decision making to ensure that there is increased scrutiny and challenge around EHCP requests, consultations, and funding requests. Our new online EHCP 'hub' will ensure greater efficiency of internal resource alongside improved accessibility and transparency around plans. A new price review process implemented to reduce the costs of external placements requests for uplifts. We will continue to hone our internal procedures through the Quality Assurance panel and SEND Performance clinics. This is producing clear impacts in terms of offsetting potential out of area placements and maintaining placements within Doncaster. 	<p>September 24</p> <p>April 24</p> <p>April 24</p> <p>March 24</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our DSG Management Plan is regularly scrutinised by DfE who also require a quarterly impact report around our ‘Delivering Better Value’ plan. Our work in this area is scrutinised by DfE advisors. We participate in national ‘Delivering Better Value’ workshops to share best practice and gather any new learning which could assist the Council position. • We undertake a thorough review of the medium-term forecast position, as part of the outturn reporting, producing a specific report on the DSG covering updates on actions agreed, Delivering Better Value programme (DBV) feedback, capital strategy, sufficiency review, and any other recommendations for consideration. • We will increase the focus on DSG High Needs Block monitoring, including further details on the key variances and updates on actions in the monitoring information provided, also including DSG High Needs Block in the monthly financial monitoring. • We will review all DSG High Needs Block costs and current funding, with a view to reducing the DSG deficit. • We will continue to conduct frequent conversations with DfE around national policy and will highlight the DSG funding challenges nationally, providing key information on the pressures and current funding shortfalls. <p>Responsible Officer: Riana Nelson – Director of Children, Young People and Families Leanne Hornsby – Assistant Director Education & Skills Debbie Hogg – Director of Corporate Resources Faye Tyas – Assistant Director of Finance and Technology</p>	<p>March 24</p> <p>Commencing July 24</p> <p>April 24</p> <p>April 24</p>
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An update on Key Improvement Areas previously identified that remained an issue in 2023-24

ISSUE: Workforce Recruitment and Retention Challenges

The national labour market continues to be reduced and stringent budgets across the sector means Council's across the country and other public sector employers are facing similar recruitment and retention challenges. The Council has a high number of vacancies and hard to fill roles which creates capacity issues and impacts on staff work-life balance and their resilience, and on our ability to sustain the delivery of high-quality services and provide value for money. The organisation must ensure it has plans in place to address the recruitment and retention challenges it faces and reduce the reliance on agency workers and market supplements. The recruitment process must continue to be improved and streamlined in order to get the right people into posts faster. In order to attract higher numbers of applicants, our employer brand must be enhanced so working for Doncaster becomes a more attractive proposition, and promotes our total rewards offer, particularly where we struggle to compete in terms of pay, and our reach must be improved so our vacancies have more exposure so that we can recruit from the widest possible talent pool, ensure inclusivity and seek a diverse workforce. Effective workforce planning is essential if the organisation is to bridge the gap between current capability and future priorities and achieve the Council's vision. Having a flexible workforce within a structural design that includes full utilisation of the apprenticeship levy and career and trainee roles will enable the opportunity to develop our own staff and provide clear career paths for existing and new staff. This will sustain the talent pipeline, improve motivation, commitment and retention, and reduce the need to recruit. There is a need to focus on hotspot areas where there are current difficulties, Adult's and Children's social care, in particular social workers, residential care officers, support workers; Digital and ICT, Legal Officers, Planning Officers, Highways Engineers and Street Scene Operatives, St Leger Homes Doncaster, trades and other construction staff.

Actions:

We need to ensure we are reaching the right audience for the role being recruited to and ensure inclusivity that supports a diverse workforce by having the ability to recruit from the widest possible talent pool.

RECRUITMENT

- We have established a working group that will be reviewing where roles are currently advertised and exploring options of how, when and where we advertise in future e.g., the use of QR codes, community hubs, through school networks, in local newspapers etc.
- We will review our advert templates, that will enable attractive adverts tailored to the role they are recruiting to.
- The Council's application forms will be reviewed to make it easier for candidates to apply for roles, while still ensuring safe recruitment requirements.
- We will review our Recruitment policy and online information to ensure managers have the tools they need when recruiting.

Completion

Date:

March 2025

- Our new and improved Recruitment website was launched in February 24. The next stage will be to ensure our careers pages are more attractive and promote the Council as a great place to work.
- Roll out further the recently established onboarding team who support the recruitment process, by carrying out pre-employment checks and maintain contact with appointees prior to their first day of employment.

Our hotspot areas:

- CYPF: A workforce strategy group continue to progress the actions within the recruitment action plan for children’s social care, including working with a recruitment partner to assist with residential recruitment along with advertising via Proud to Care and pushing out via social media channels.
- Digital and ICT roles have been converted to trainee roles with clear career progression criteria.
- Place: The approach in all hard to fill roles such as engineers, surveyors and planners where professional qualifications are required, jobs have been converted to trainee career graded posts. In frontline services incentives for training, development and flexibility are utilised. The majority of service areas have apprenticeship opportunities that have been recruited to.
- Adults Wellbeing & Culture: There has been a real focus on Social Worker (SW) recruitment which has been reasonably successful. This has involved an advertising campaign using social media, industry publications, and Reed permanent solutions. A number of Social Work Apprenticeship opportunities have been created, offering six places to join the Social Work Apprenticeship Degree Programme within Adult Social Care and a guaranteed permanent SW role at the end of it.
- There has also been structural re-design in service areas where there are national skills shortages.

RETENTION, WORKFORCE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- Workforce planning/talent pipeline - we are reviewing the work experience and apprenticeship offer and how we engage with schools and colleges and are committed to ensuring full utilisation of the apprenticeship levy.
- There is an ongoing analysis of training requirements, and skills gaps, so that we can revise our learning and development offer to meet current and future needs. We will also consider the opportunities and challenges technology advancement offers to the council in relation to our future workforce needs.
- Wellbeing - If we are to retain staff, we must continue to enhance the Council’s wellbeing offer which will positively impact employee satisfaction levels and in turn, motivation, and

<p>productivity. We are planning to conduct a staff survey to understand levels of staff engagement and the action that as a Council we need to take to increase engagement across the board.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council is also creating a framework for staff networks which will further our goal of becoming an employer of choice. <p>Responsible Officer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lee Tillman – Assistant Director of Policy Insight & Change • Rebecca Hardwick – Head of Service, Human Resources 	
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<p>ISSUE: Social Care Data Quality</p> <p>Information related to social care contained within the MOSAIC case management system should be improved. Significant changes, particularly in Children’s Social Care in 23-24 have meant major work to ensure continuity of reporting, good information to inform service decisions and reporting of statutory returns.</p> <p>To be clear this has been an extraordinary situation and does not just cover the ‘usual’ data quality processes and routines that surround social care performance as a feature of good performance management. We are clear that we want to ensure effective reporting of all statutory returns for 2023-24 where the majority of work will take place April – September 2024; once this has taken place and we are confident of improvements we may be able to retire this issue into Business As Usual data quality processes. It is also worthy to note that inspections for Childrens and Adult Social Care nationally are likely over the following 12 months and our data quality process will be part of that process.</p> <p>In addition, the SYNERGY system and a newly implemented IDOX system that records information linked to Education and Special Education Needs, and Disabilities (SEND), along with locally recorded information will be used to ensure that information and reporting is effective in the performance management of systems.</p>	
<p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the reports required for SEND information that is needed for Statutory Inspections • Deliver all Childrens Statutory Returns and evaluate the progress made compared to last year • Deliver all Adults Statutory Returns and evaluate the progress made compared to last year <p>Responsible Officer: Lee Tillman – Assistant Director of Policy Insight & Change Allan Wiltshire – Head of Service, Policy Insight & Change</p>	<p>Completion Date:</p> <p>May 2024</p> <p>Sep/Oct 2024</p> <p>Sep/Oct 2024</p>

ISSUE: Sufficiency of Doncaster children’s placement

In Doncaster we believe that it is best for children to live with their families. However this is not always possible. In these circumstances the Local Authority will utilise a variety of placement options, including special guardianship orders, adoption, foster care or residential care. Children’s placement sufficiency remains a local regional and national challenge which poses a significant financial, regulatory, and reputational risk. In Doncaster there is understanding that without the right investment in local sufficiency children will be at risk of being placed in higher cost placements and complex children may be placed at significant distance and at times in unregulated / unregistered settings. There has positive progress made in 23-24 to reducing the number of out of authority placements through effective permanency planning. In line with the placement strategy, 2 new residential homes were purchased but unfortunately the difficulty in recruitment of residential workers remains an issue. The recruitment of foster carers is a further pressure point with a slight improvement in in-house recruitment, however independent foster care placements remain high. The number of adoptions during 23/24 has increased but more needs to be done to recruit adopters from diverse backgrounds. There has been significant financial investment across the last year spent to ensure all children have the quality support they need, to develop local in-house provision and to uplift foster carer fees. However, this challenge is set to continue in the year ahead. Recruitment to key residential vacancies, including managers is challenging which limits the growth of Doncaster’s in-house provision. There remains a focused programme of development, recruitment and retention.

Actions:

- Recruitment of adopters and foster carers
- Recruitment and retention action plan for social workers and residential staff
- Review and further development of strategic partnerships with quality providers local to Doncaster to increase sufficiency linked to need
- Forecasting need across the directorate an age range to ensure future developments meet the changing needs of the cohort. (2024 – 2027 sufficiency strategy)

Responsible Officer:

Riana Nelson – Director of Children, Young People and Families
Rebecca Wall – Assistant Director Children’s Social Care

Completion Date:
March 2025

Statement of Commitment

We have been advised of the implications of the result of the 2023-24 review of the effectiveness of the governance and internal control frameworks by the Audit Committee and of the plans to address identified weaknesses and ensure continuous improvement of the system in place. We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to enhance further the Council's governance and internal control arrangements.

We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and that we will monitor their implementation and operation over the next year and as part of our next annual review of effectiveness.

Signed on behalf of City of Doncaster Council:

Ros Jones
Mayor of Doncaster

Damian Allen
Chief Executive

Key Areas of Improvement from previous Statements that have been completed.

Areas requiring improvement that have been identified in previous statements that have been effectively managed to the extent that they are no longer significant at this point in the 2023-24 Annual Governance Statement:

- ❖ **Assurance over Future Financial Sustainability of the Council and its Key Partners –**
An improvement area was identified in relation to Financial Sustainability as the Council continues to be heavily impacted by cost pressures, including the impact of inflation, both pay and contract price inflation and Service pressures, in particular for Children’s Social Care and increasing pressures on Adults Social Care budgets. The adults and children's social care pressures continue to be monitored closely due to the size of the budgets and volatility. Further work on the savings and pressures has been undertaken and incorporated into the 2024/25 budget approved by Council in February 2024.
- ❖ **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion Inspection -** An improvement area was identified in relation to an Ofsted inspection. Doncaster continues to be in the window for a SEND and Inclusion OfSTED inspection. Preparations in terms of compliance and quality assurance continue and the partnership governance is well established.
- ❖ **Doncaster Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) –** An improvement area was identified following an Ofsted inspection of Local Authority Children’s services in Feb 2022, where the overall outcome judgement was ‘Requires Improvement to be Good’. There were a series of recommendations that were outlined in the judgement letter. This resulted in a rapid quality and improvement plan and the establishment of new governance arrangements, including the Transformation and Improvement Board that was chaired by the Chief Executive, and included an independent Department for Education (DfE) advisor and DfE rep and the Practice Improvement Group, chaired by the Director of Childrens Services. Their respective remits were to oversee the improvement journey. Running alongside this the Council brought Children’s Social Care back into the Council and over the last 18 months has successfully onboarded all services. There has been evidential progress made, which was recognised by Ofsted in a Children’s Services focused visit in May 23, which considered our front door (initial response) arrangements. The report from that visit stated: “Senior leaders have significantly improved strategic planning and partnership working at the front door since the last inspection. Leaders know the service well. Performance management and quality assurance arrangements that support managers in monitoring this practice area have been strengthened. This improvement has taken place at pace, and at a time of significant change while transitioning children’s services from Doncaster Children’s Trust back to City of Doncaster Council control.” This was further reinforced in the recent Annual Conversation with DfE and Ofsted in Jan 24. The Practice

Improvement Board continues to operate, complimented by monthly performance clinics that monitor quality and performance, with a clear focus on practice and culture.

- ❖ **Adult Social Care Market Sustainability** – Market sustainability has significantly improved. The Council has invested in adult social care provision, with between 20 and 25% increase in fee rates for 2023-24 following the completion of fair cost of care exercises alongside local providers. At the time of writing 87% of the 119 local care providers that have been inspected by the Care Quality Commission Consultation have received a rating of either Good or Outstanding, with only one provider currently having the lowest rating of Inadequate. Capacity within the sector has improved significantly over the last year and there are currently no waiting times for people who need a Domiciliary Care provider.