



Annual Governance Statement 2014/15

**NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2014/15**

1 Executive Summary

This document describes Northampton Borough Council's governance arrangements and assesses how closely the Council aligns with good practice. In overall terms this is a positive statement for the financial year 2014/15. This document relies on several assurance mechanisms including the internal audit annual review, internal audit reports throughout the year, the Statement of Accounts, Audit Committee, the overview and scrutiny process, and external audit.

External audit was undertaken by the Audit Commission until November 2012, from which time KPMG have taken over. This provides assurance on the controls the Council has in place. Where the auditor identifies weaknesses in the Council's arrangements, these are highlighted in the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter. The Council received an unqualified audit opinion on its 2013/14 accounts, the latest ones published.

No significant issues were raised in last year's statement.

2 Statement of Compliance

The authority's financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of CIPFA's Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010) as set out in the Application Note to Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework in the majority of areas.

There is one area which has slightly different arrangements from those outlined in the CIPFA Statement and this will continue into future years:

Partnerships – The creation of Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH) on 5 January 2015, to manage the Housing Stock on behalf of the Council. The Governance of this wholly owned subsidiary is through the NPH Board. The Board is responsible for the business of the Company subject to compliance with the provisions of the Companies Act 2006 and the articles of association for Northampton Partnership Homes Limited.

The Board comprises of 16 members including representatives from tenants, Northampton Borough Council elected Members, independent members and two employees of the Company. The structure of the Board is such that no single group holds a majority position. The Board meet approximately every month. The Board is supported by five Committees; Finance, Audit & Risk, Asset Management, Operations and HR. Each Committee comprises of 5 Members of the Board and currently meet monthly. Committees have no delegated powers relevant to their specific terms of reference but they consider the detail of matters under their remit and report to the Board where formal approval to any reports and proposals is given.

3 Scope of responsibility

The 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, and is 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.

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, which includes arrangements for the management of risk. Overview and challenge of the Council's management of risk is performed by the Audit Committee.

Northampton Borough Council has, through its cross party Constitutional Review Working Group, agreed a local code of corporate governance which is consistent with the principles of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) / Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' from 2007. A copy of the local code is on the Council's website at www.northampton.gov.uk.

This Annual Governance Statement explains how the Council has complied with the code and also meets the requirements of regulation 4(3) and 4(4) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011.

4 The purpose of the governance framework

The System of Internal Control and the Governance Framework have been in place at Northampton Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2015 and up to the date of the approval of the statement of accounts.

The Governance Framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the council is directed and controlled and the activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

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, not absolute, assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims, and objectives. It is also designed to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and their impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

5 The Governance Framework

The Constitution is the relevant governance document and the Code of Governance forms part of it. The Borough Secretary (the 'Monitoring Officer') has a duty to monitor and review the operation of the Constitution to ensure its aims and principles are given full effect. The Council reviews the Constitution regularly to incorporate any necessary changes. The Constitution is kept under regular review to ensure it is accurate and reflects current best practice and legal requirements.

The Council's Governance Framework derives from the six core principles identified in a 2004 publication entitled The Good Governance Standard for Public Services. This was produced by the Independent Commission on Good Governance in Public Services – a commission set up by CIPFA, and the Office for Public Management. The commission utilised work done by, amongst others, Cadbury (1992), Nolan (1995) and CIPFA / SOLACE (2001). These principles were adapted for application to local authorities and published by CIPFA in 2007. The six core principles that this Governance Framework follows and the key elements of each of those core principles are as follows.

5.1 Focusing on the purpose of the authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area.

The Council's strategic objectives are set out in the Corporate Plan 2014 Update, which was adopted by the Council at its meeting on 23 February 2015. These objectives are based around the two headings:

- Your Town
- You

Progress against the plan is monitored via the Council's Corporate Performance Framework which integrates financial and service planning. The Council's annual financial planning process is driven by the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy to ensure that the future priorities and ambitions are resourced.

Partnership working is an important way in which Local Government can deliver more efficient and effective services to local residents. The Council is a member of a number of partnerships with organisations across the local area, and in some cases is also the lead authority with responsibility for establishing and leading some of these partnerships.

The Council has adopted a Partnerships Protocol. The protocol establishes minimum standards of governance and management to be followed by partnerships in order to satisfy the Council that the partnerships are being well run and are delivering benefit to the Council and the residents of the Borough. The protocol outlines key requirements for initiating, approving, setting up, operating, reviewing, and exiting partnership arrangements including the Governance Arrangements to be adopted.

The Council maintains a database of all partnerships it is involved in. This contains details of the Council's representatives in the partnership, the Council's contribution, the name of the lead organisation, the resources committed by the Council and the risk register. The Council evaluates each partnership to assess the risks and rewards to the Council and local communities, including legal issues, insurance, implications arising from the Council's Constitution, the Council's own processes and applicable protocols, financial regulations, issues of partnership procurement and whether the benefits from the partnership are likely to justify the costs involved in membership. The viability and validity of continuing with any partnership is reviewed on a regular basis as part of the ongoing service planning process.

The Council undertakes a significant number of consultations with customers. To facilitate this, the Council has adopted a consultation toolkit and web based portal. This process sets out a clear methodology for defining aims and objectives, resourcing the consultation, defining the level and method of consultation required, identifying whom to consult, ensuring inclusivity, planning the consultation, using the results, and evaluating the effectiveness of the consultation. Through adopting this methodology, the Council can be sure that consultations are more focussed and effective.

The Council has a comprehensive and robust performance management framework. The framework is reviewed annually to ensure that learning and improvement is captured and changes made where necessary. The Council monitors delivery of its priorities and objectives through the performance management framework. A service plan is in place for each of the Council's service areas and the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan are embedded in these plans. The service plans represent the key plan for each service and clearly set out targets and actions for each service and how each service area contributes to corporate objectives and targets. The service plans address service level improvements, including value for money objectives. Service plans also set out how each service will contribute to a range of corporate performance and improvement imperatives.

A Management Board Data Set of performance statistics is reported on a monthly basis to Management Board and performance data is included in regular combined performance and financial monitoring reports to Cabinet. Service plans are reviewed at Departmental Management Teams, ensuring that plans remain current, that targets remain relevant and appropriately challenging, and that the service is delivering the actions necessary to achieve the corporate objectives.

Through reviews by external auditors, external agencies, Internal Audit, and internal review teams, the Council constantly seeks ways of ensuring the economic, effective and efficient use of resources, and for securing continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

A corporate procurement strategy/toolkit has been developed to ensure proper arrangements are in place for procurement of goods and services. This was reviewed by Members and senior officers before being adopted. Revised procurement rules were adopted in March 2008. All budgets are allocated to named budget officers, who are responsible for controlling spend against budgets, and who are also responsible for assets used in the provision of their services.

The Council's Risk Management Strategy, which incorporates business continuity management, was further improved in 2011. The Strategy clearly sets out the processes and responsibilities for managing risks across the authority and is supported by a Risk and Business Continuity Management Handbook. Risks are identified and registers comprehensively refreshed on an annual basis as part of the Service Planning process and are updated regularly at Departmental Management Team meetings. This enables risks to be associated clearly to objectives and priorities, providing management with valuable monthly reporting information and ensuring resources are targeted to the priorities and objectives most at risk.

All significant projects have their own risk register, which is maintained and monitored by project managers and Programme and Project Boards as appropriate.

The Council has approved a list of critical functions and business continuity plans for these functions are well developed across the authority. A high proportion of these plans have been tested.

5.2 Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles

5.2.1 The Constitution

The Council has adopted a Constitution, which sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures that are followed to ensure these are efficient, transparent, and accountable to local people. The constitution reflects the 'Executive/Scrutiny' model following the Local Government Act 2000. The Constitution has been reviewed and a revised Constitution was published in February 2013.

5.2.2 The Cabinet

Cabinet is responsible for making executive decisions as defined by law and operates within the budget and policy framework approved annually by full Council. Meetings are open to the public except when personal or confidential matters are being discussed. Accountable Cabinet Members have authority to make non-key delegated decisions in accordance with the Leader's Scheme of Delegations in the Constitution. Furthermore, senior and other officers of the Council can make decisions under delegated authority – again the extent of these delegations is set out in the Officers' Scheme of Delegations in the Constitution. The Council publishes an executive decision notice, which contains details of key decisions to be made by the Cabinet. Each Cabinet member has a specific range of responsibilities requiring him or her to work closely with senior and other employees in order to achieve the Council's ambitions.

5.2.3 Management Board

The Council's Management Board, which consists of the Chief Executive, Directors, the Chief Finance (s.151) Officer, and the Monitoring Officer met on a regular basis during 2014/15. Management Board considers other internal control issues, including strategic risk management, performance management, compliance, efficiency and value for money, and financial management. Management Board has a corporate responsibility for the messages that the Council puts out, both internally and externally.

5.2.4 Corporate Briefing

This group consists of Management Board members and all Heads of Service. This group met on a regular basis during 2014/15. The group, which is non-decision making, provides collective responsibility for:

- Providing corporate leadership
- Employee development
- Internal and external communications
- Performance management
- Co-ordinating and delivering corporate objectives and priorities for action
- Reviewing corporate policy
- Reviewing corporate standards
- Considering key operational matters

5.2.5 Directorate Management Team

Each Directorate has a Directorate Management Team where the Director and Heads of Service meet to discuss Management Board feedback, council wide and service specific matters. These meetings ensure that:

- Directorates contribute to Management Board, Corporate Briefing and other teams/groups
- Feedback from Management Board, Corporate Briefing and other teams/groups is communicated within the Directorate
- Communication of corporate requirements within and between teams within the respective directorate occurs
- Service area performance is reviewed through Performance Report Packs.

5.2.6 Managers' Workshop

The managers' workshop started in 2007/08 and meets monthly throughout the year covering a range of corporate subjects. The workshop attendance covers all managers and team leaders across the council.

5.2.7 Programme and Project Management Governance

During 2014/15 key Programme Boards reported into Management Board on the key project streams for the year of Northampton Alive, LGSS, ALMO Implementation, Prevention, Improvement, and Capital Programme Board. Each Programme Board is chaired by the Chief Executive, Borough Secretary, or a Director, and they report into Management Board by exception. The Programme Boards will not encompass every single project that NBC is actively delivering, but rather those identified by Management Board as requiring corporate governance controls.

The Programme and project governance framework will signpost to other areas of governance that are required within the organisation. This saves the need for separate governance boards being set up and ensures integration across all of the specialist areas.

During 2014/15 the Monitoring Officer chaired the Improvement Programme Board, which oversees the core improvement projects of the council.

The NBC Project Management Best Practice Guide provides direction on the approach and the tools and templates available to support the programmes and projects. This ensures that those projects that are not deemed as requiring corporate governance controls will still maintain the NBC project management approach.

5.2.8 Codes and Protocols

The council has adopted a number of codes and protocols that govern both Member and officer activities. These are mainly reviewed annually:

- Members Code of Conduct
- Members Register of Interests
- Officers Code of Conduct
- Officers Register of Interests
- Protocol for Members and officers regarding probity planning
- Protocol on Member/Employee relations
- Register of Gifts and hospitality – Members and Officers
- Counter Fraud
- Whistleblowing policy
- RIPA Policy
- Complaints and compliments procedures

5.3 Promoting values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour

The Council has designated the Borough Secretary as the Council's Monitoring Officer. It is the function of the Monitoring Officer to ensure compliance with established policies, procedures, laws, and regulations. The Monitoring Officer also supports the Standards Committee and is the nominated officer for Whistleblowing. After consulting the Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer (section 151 Officer), he will report to the Council, under Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, if he considers that any proposal, decision, or omission would give rise to unlawfulness or maladministration. Such a report will have the effect of stopping the proposal or decision being implemented until the report has been considered.

The Council has a Standards Committee which is responsible for: -

- Ensuring Councillors and other representatives are trained to carry out their duties effectively;
- Advising on the Members' Code of Conduct and helping Councillors and other representatives to understand what their duties are in relation to the Code;
- Investigating complaints received about elected Borough and Parish Council Members;
- Monitoring the operation of the Code;
- Conducting local hearings and determination of sanctions should a breach of the Code of Conduct be found;
- Granting dispensations to Councillors, co-opted members from requirements relating to interests set out in the Members' Code of Conduct;
- Advising the Council on other Codes and Protocols forming the authority's ethical framework;
- Considering arrangements for the appointment of Independent Members to the Committee;
- Ensuring the authority operates within a robust corporate governance framework; and
- Considering any report referred to it by the Cabinet or any other Committee where there are implications for ethical standards and report back as appropriate.

On 21 June 2012 the Council's internal auditors (PWC) presented a report to Management Board on the electronic governance survey launched in December 2011, as part of the planned 2011/12 audit work. A similar survey was carried out in March 2010, which was compared with the 2011/12 results. PWC's recommendation was that the Council should consider further the responses to statements 2 and 3 where there was a negative change in perception since 2010 and the response to statement 7 where a quarter of respondents felt that the Council doesn't manage large projects and significant contracts effectively. These statements and the context to them are shown below.

- 2 We perform effectively in clearly defined functions and roles
Matters to consider before making your assessment:

Do we all know what we are supposed to be doing? Do we understand our roles and responsibilities and those of others charged with governance? Is there collective responsibility for decisions taken? Do we understand the views of the public and service users and do we obtain robust information about these views?

- 3 We promote values for the whole Council and demonstrate the values of good governance through behaviour.

Matters to consider before making your assessment:

What are the values we expect staff to demonstrate in their behaviour and actions? Does our behaviour (collectively and individually) demonstrate that we take our responsibilities seriously? Can our behaviour weaken the organisation's aims and objectives?

- 7 We manage large projects and significant contracts effectively and efficiently, minimising risk to the Authority and ensuring that the best outcomes are achieved from the resources used.

Matters to consider before making your assessment:

Do we perform effective risk management for large projects and contracts? Do we consult with the public and service users? Do we assess whether outcomes are achieved in line with expectations? Do we assess value for money appropriately before embarking on projects?

The Council implemented a new governance structure for its key projects in 2012/13 that addresses the issues raised in the Governance Survey Report. (See section 5.2.7 above).

The financial management of the Authority is conducted in accordance with the financial rules set out at Article 13 and in the Financial Regulations section within the Constitution. The Council has a designated Chief Finance Officer in accordance with Section 151 (S151) of the Local Government Act 1972. The Strategic Finance Managers are Deputy S151 officers. The Council has in place a three-year Financial Strategy, updated annually, to support the medium-term aims of the Corporate Plan.

The Council maintains an Internal Audit service provided through a contract with PricewaterhouseCoopers, who operate to the standards set out in the 'Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government in the UK'. Individual services produce annual service plans. These Service Plans are updated each year so as to incorporate the Corporate Plan requirements into service activities, so that services know what they are required to do to achieve the Council's priorities and ambitions. These plans also identify any governance impact. During 2014/15 the internal audit plan placed a focus on ensuring compliance across the organisation.

The Council's external audit services have been provided by KPMG since November 2012. They audit the Statement of Accounts; grant returns, whole of government accounts and national fraud initiative.

5.4 Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk

The Council has several committees, which carry out regulatory or scrutiny functions:

5.4.1 Cabinet

Cabinet makes executive decisions.

5.4.2 Planning Committee

Planning Committee determines planning applications and related matters.

5.4.3 Standards Committee

Standards Committee promotes monitors and helps to maintain high ethical standards amongst the Council's Members, and this extends to having the same responsibility for all town and parish councils within the Borough.

The Standards Committee has produced periodic newsletters for the benefit of Members, Parish Councillors and relevant officers, to provide updates on the national position, advice on matters in relation to Standards generally and to also remind Members of their obligations under the Code of Conduct, the Register of Interests, Gifts and Hospitality.

5.4.4 Audit Committee

Audit Committee provides assurance about the adequacy of internal controls, financial accounting and performance reporting arrangements, and that effective risk management is in place. Its work is intended to enhance public trust in the corporate and financial governance of the council. It also reviews areas of concern to the committee, particularly around risk, fraud and failure of systems of control.

The Audit Committee has continued to be effective during 2014/15. There remain no High Risk areas in the Council. Audit Committee has the opportunity to question and challenge on any reports brought before it. This supports a good internal control framework.

The Committee also approved the 2013/14 Annual Governance Statement (AGS) and Statement of Accounts, and will approve these for 2014/15. The committee receives annual training from internal and external audit.

5.4.5 Licensing Committee

Licensing Committee monitors and reviews the effectiveness of the Council's licensing policy and procedures and make individual licensing decisions as required.

5.4.6 General Purposes Committee

General Purposes Committee, which is a sub-committee of full Council, makes decisions that are not the responsibility of the Executive or other committees,

5.4.7 Appointments and Appeals Committee

Appointments and Appeals Committee has responsibility for appraising senior officers and dealing with certain disciplinary and grievance matters.

5.4.8 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Since May 2010 the Council has had one Overview and Scrutiny Committee which sets up time-limited Scrutiny Panels to carry out in-depth Reviews. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee comprises fifteen Members. The Scrutiny Panels now hold their meetings in public and individuals are encouraged to attend.

Some of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee responsibilities are:

- **Co-ordinating Work Programme** – to co-ordinate the work plan to avoid duplication and ensure joint working, or other suitable arrangements.
- **Allocation of Resources** – to consider the overall work loads of Scrutiny Panels and to agree the allocation of resources to each Panel according to need on an equal basis.
- **Involvement of other People in the Overview and Scrutiny Process** – to review arrangements for involving Councillors or people outside the Council, in the Overview and Scrutiny process, such as by co-option, or setting up working parties which include outside representatives and be responsible for agreeing appointments of external parties to relevant Scrutiny Panel.
- **Training and Development** – to review training needs of Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members and of Councillors and Council employees generally in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny process; and to consider the development of operational styles and techniques to aid the usefulness and effectiveness of the Overview and Scrutiny process.
- **Appoint three Overview and Scrutiny Panels**
- **Policy Development and Review** – The Overview and Scrutiny Committee may assist the Council and Cabinet in the development of its Budget and Policy Framework by in-depth analysis of policy issues by a variety of methods.
- **Support Needs** – To consider any general issues which arise with regard to the levels of co-operation and support which the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Panels receive from other parts of the Council.

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the modernised arrangements for governance in local councils and also an important mechanism for driving forward performances in services. The four key legislative roles are: -

- Holding the Executive to account
- Policy development and review
- Best Value Reviews
- External Scrutiny

Overview and Scrutiny provides the opportunity for Councillors that are not members of Cabinet to examine various functions of the Council, to question how key decisions have been made and to champion issues of local concern to residents.

Overview and Scrutiny is charged with finding ways of ensuring that the issues that matter to the public are the focus of their attention, and with finding new ways of getting citizens involved in the things that affect them. Overview and Scrutiny has considerable powers:

- Holding decision makers to account
- Challenging and improving performance
- Supporting the achievement of value for money
- Challenging the ways things are done
- Influencing decision makers with evidence based recommendations
- Bringing the evidence and views of stakeholders, users and citizens

Overview and Scrutiny is Councillor led. As well as Councillors leading on the review of topics, where they research issues and develop recommendations, they are also involved in setting the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda, bringing forward topics and issues, identifying who they want to hear from to help their work and what they want to know and how they want it presented to them.

The O&S Committees can “call-in” a decision that has been made by the Executive but not yet implemented, to enable it to consider whether the decision is appropriate. Call in can be referred to O&S by at least two Councillors.

Overview and Scrutiny becomes involved with decisions at an appropriate early stage to apply real influence and therefore play the important role of ‘critical friend’ to Cabinet.

The Council’s Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee is a very effective model, both for pre-decision investigations, and for a call-in process to scrutinize decisions of the executive. Overview and Scrutiny was nominated for an award as part of the Centre for Public Scrutiny’s (CfPS) Good Scrutiny Awards 2013 under the category transforming services for its review - Managing Community Centres.

5.5 Developing the capacity and capability of members and officers to be effective

The Council has a structured Councillor Development programme which is informed by corporate priorities, legislative changes and individual personal development plans for councillors. The programme is overseen by the Councillor Development Group, which comprises of councillors from all political groups and officers to determine priorities and agree programmes of development on a rolling three-month programme. It also evaluates and monitors outcomes from development sessions.

5.6 Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability

The Council recognises the diversity of our communities, the importance of community empowerment and the need to provide appropriate opportunities for customers and communities to participate at whatever level they wish to influence service delivery, decision making and policy development.

The Council's community engagement activities are brought together into one overarching strategy. The key principles of the strategy are that:

- Communities should be involved in the decisions that affect them
- Communities deserve high quality public services, shaped around their needs
- Council policies and strategies should reflect local priorities, requirements and aspirations.

The Council's Corporate Plan embraces, among other priorities, the ambition to have a vibrant town, to provide value for money to protect local services, to create empowered communities and to respond to people's needs when providing and delivering services. A robust performance framework is in place to monitor progress and success.

6 Review of Effectiveness

The Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The process adopted during 2014/15 for a review is below.

- Contributions and comments from Heads of Service and Management Board
- Internal Audit review for comment
- Audit Committee review for comment
- Review and approval by Management Board
- Review and approval by the Audit Committee

The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the managers within the Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Internal Auditor's annual report and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

The contributions from senior managers included suggestions for work to be undertaken to enhance skills, systems and processes to ensure standards are adhered to, improved financial management in the organisation, improvements to the transparency of decision making, capacity concerns and other risks arising from the pace of change. In addition it was recommended that work is undertaken to enhance the member/officer interface and understanding of the decision making process. It has also been highlighted that there are some challenges in developing and supporting the new Standards Regime following massive changes brought about by the legislation.

Internal Audit, under the terms of engagement, is required to provide those charged with governance with an opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the council's:

- Risk management
- Control and;
- Governance processes.

Collectively this is referred to as "the system of internal control".

An audit plan is prepared each year and is agreed at the Audit Committee. For 2014/15 the audit plan was agreed by Audit Committee in November 2014.

As part of the changes with the implementation of the LGSS project, certain internal audits were transferred to LGSS to provide assurance where the relevant services had been transferred to LGSS. The Internal Audit Draft Outturn is therefore reported in 2 parts below – PWC findings and LGSS. The following table illustrates how this has been done:

<i>Auditable Unit</i>	<i>Internal audit scope</i>
Debtors Creditors IBS Creditors Fixed Assets Cash	Some controls remain in Northampton Borough Council. These have been assessed and included in the scope of our annual opinion.
General Ledger Payroll Housing Benefits Finance - Agresso IT General Computer Controls Procurement	Key controls fall entirely outside the scope of Northampton Borough Council.

The reporting process for Internal Audit requires a report of each audit to be submitted to the relevant service manager and/or chief officer. The report includes recommendations for improvements that are included within an action plan and requires agreement or rejection by service manager and/or chief officers. The process includes follow-up reviews of recommendations to ensure that they are acted upon, usually within six months. All Internal Audit reports include a report on the quality and effectiveness of internal control within the Council's systems, and an assessment in accordance with quantification and classification of internal control level definitions. These definitions are summarised below.

PWC Draft internal Audit Outturn





Individual Findings are rated using the guidelines shown in the following table.

<i>Finding rating</i>	<i>Assessment rationale</i>
<i>Critical</i>	A finding that could have a: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Critical</i> impact on operational performance; or • <i>Critical</i> monetary or financial statement impact; or • <i>Critical</i> breach in laws and regulations that could result in material fines or consequences; or • <i>Critical</i> impact on the reputation or brand of the organisation which could threaten its future viability.
<i>High</i>	A finding that could have a: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Significant</i> impact on operational performance; or • <i>Significant</i> monetary or financial statement impact; or • <i>Significant</i> breach in laws and regulations resulting in significant fines and consequences; or • <i>Significant</i> impact on the reputation or brand of the organisation.
<i>Medium</i>	A finding that could have a: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Moderate</i> impact on operational performance; or • <i>Moderate</i> monetary or financial statement impact ; or • <i>Moderate</i> breach in laws and regulations resulting in fines and consequences ; or • <i>Moderate</i> impact on the reputation or brand of the organisation.
<i>Low</i>	A finding that could have a: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Minor</i> impact on the organisation's operational performance; or • <i>Minor</i> monetary or financial statement impact; or • <i>Minor</i> breach in laws and regulations with limited consequences; or • <i>Minor</i> impact on the reputation of the organisation.
<i>Advisory</i>	A finding that does not have a risk impact but has been raised to highlight areas of inefficiencies or good practice.

Each of these rating levels attracts a set number of points as shown in the table below.

<i>Findings rating</i>	<i>Points</i>
Critical	40 points per finding
High	10 points per finding
Medium	3 points per finding
Low	1 point per finding

The aggregate number of points an audit has scored indicates the overall level of risk of that control area. The number of points for each level of risk is shown in the table below.

<i>Report classification</i>	<i>Points</i>
 Critical risk	40 points and over
 High risk	16– 39 points
 Medium risk	7– 15 points
 Low risk	6 points or less

Based on the work completed, internal audit have been unable to issue an opinion due to an insufficient amount of audit work that has been completed. PwC have encountered issues during the year which has limited their ability to complete the planned schedule of work. These issues include delays in approval of the plan, and as a result of substantial change at NBC, arising from the outsourcing of various support services, delays in obtaining the required information and restrictions in scope of works.

As a result, PwC have been unable to complete enough reviews and gather sufficient information to conclude on the adequacy and effectiveness of Northampton Borough Council's arrangements for governance, risk management and control.

The disclaimer opinion is based on:

- Only three assurance audits have been completed during the year
- Scope of work was limited on the Directorate Governance & Accountability Reviews
- The proportion of the organisations audit needs have been covered to date

During the year PwC completed three assurance reviews. They identified 1 high, 6 medium and 8 low risk rated findings. The review of Financial Delegations indicated that the Council does not currently have robust controls and processes in place to ensure that the scheme of delegations set up in the financial system is accurate and complete. PwC acknowledge that there are a number of controls, e.g. budget setting and review, which may subsequently identify inappropriate transactions. The Council has already taken measures to review this control.

LGSS Internal Audit

It was agreed by the S151 Officer and the council's internal auditors (PwC) that where LGSS have taken on the responsibility to undertake the functions during 2014/15, LGSS Internal Audit would complete the assurance work relating to LGSS functions, and PwC would continue to audit those aspects which remain in the direct control of the council. LGSS has worked with PwC to plan and undertake their work to ensure the full coverage required to provide the assurance opinions, whilst minimising duplication of work.

Individual Findings and the overall level of control are rated by LGSS Internal Audit using the guidelines shown in the following table.

Assurance	Definition
Full Assurance	There is a sound system of control designed to address the relevant risks with controls being consistently applied.
Substantial Assurance	There is a sound system of control, designed to address the relevant risks, but there is evidence of non-compliance with some of the controls.
Moderate Assurance	Whilst there is a basically a sound system of control, designed to address the relevant risks, there are weaknesses in the system, that leaves some risks not addressed and there is evidence of non-compliance with some of the controls.
Limited Assurance	The system of control is weak and there is evidence of non-compliance with the controls that do exist which may result in the relevant risks not being managed.
No Assurance	There is no system of internal control. Risks are not being managed.

The areas reviewed by LGSS in 2014/15 were Accounts Receivable (Debtors), Accounts Payable (Creditors), General Ledger, Payroll, Bank Reconciliation (Cash), Fixed Assets, and Treasury Management.

LGSS is pleased to report that they were able to give “substantial” or “full” assurance on all the systems that have been reviewed.

Auditable Area	Assurance Opinion
Accounts Receivable	Substantial
Accounts Payable	Substantial
General Ledger	Substantial
Payroll	Substantial
Bank Reconciliation	Full
Fixed Assets	Full
Treasury Management	Substantial

The overall level of control on the LGSS areas was assessed as ‘Substantial’ by LGSS internal audit.

Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH)

On 5 January 2015 NPH began trading. NPH is an Arm’s Length Management Organisation, wholly owned by the Council. NPH is a subsidiary of the Council for accounting purposes and their accounts have been consolidated into the Council’s Group Accounts.

NPH recently appointed their own Internal Auditors (Bakertilly) and in future their annual reports will be considered as part of the annual governance review. As trading only commenced 5 January a full annual report could not be completed for 2014/15.

7 Significant Governance Issues

7.1 Review of the previous year's Significant Governance Issues

The 2013/14 Annual Governance Statement highlighted no significant control weaknesses.

7.2 This year's Significant Governance Issues

One High Risk control weakness was identified by PWC for 2014/15 in relation to financial delegations set up in the financial system. This leaves the Council open to the risk of inappropriate transactions. Management board have already started taking the necessary action to address this risk.

7.3 Areas of Good Practice

Internal Audit also identified areas where few weaknesses were identified and / or areas of good practice.

- Environmental Contract Management – Day to day contract management processes are well structured with formal reporting mechanisms internally and with other related parties and the contractor.
- Directorate Governance – From the limited testing performed we note that there are effective monitoring controls relating to performance, risk and budgets within the Directorates.

8 Conclusion

The Council proposes to address the matters arising to further enhance governance arrangements. The Council is satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in the review of effectiveness and the progress of these will be monitored during the year and their implementation and operation will be reported on as part of our next annual review.

9 Approval of the Annual Governance Statement

In accordance with the appropriate regulations, the Annual Governance Statement was approved by the Audit Committee on 7th September 2015 at the same time as the Statement of Accounts for 2014/15 was approved.

Councillor Mary Markham

Leader of the Council

Date:

David Kennedy

Chief Executive

Date: