

Report to: Shared Revenues & Benefits Service - Joint Committee	Electoral Ward Affected ALL
Meeting to be held on 29th July 2025	
Report submitted by: Director of Resources (Preston City Council)	
Report Title: SHARED SERVICE – ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2024/25 Shared Revenues and Benefits Service ('Appendix A' refers)	

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report requests that the Shared Revenue and Benefits Service Joint Committee considers and approves the Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25. The Annual Governance Statement is set out in **Appendix A** to this report.

2. Decision Required

- 2.1 The Joint Committee is requested to:
- (i) Approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25, as set out in **Appendix A** to this report.

3. Information

- 3.1 The Shared Revenue and Benefits Service Joint Committee ("Joint Committee") serving both Councils (Lancaster and Preston), operates under a Local Code of Governance via the host authority (Preston), which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework – Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework "the Framework".
- 3.2 In line with good practice and CIPFA principles in relation to the effectiveness of internal control at each authority, it is considered / appropriate for the Joint Committee to approve an Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25, to accompany the (unaudited) Annual Statement of Accounts 2024/25.
- 3.3 The Framework offers guidance that a Governance Statement should cover all the significant corporate systems, processes and controls, spanning the whole range of the authorities activities, including in particular those designed to ensure that:
- The Partner Authorities have maintained an adequate system of internal control
 - Measures are in place to prevent and detect fraud and corruption
 - The authorities policies are implemented in practice
 - High quality services are delivered efficiently and effectively
 - The authorities values and ethical standards are met

- Laws and regulations are complied with
- Required processes are adhered to
- Financial statements and other published performance indicators are accurate and reliable
- Human, financial, environmental and other resources are managed efficiently and effectively

- 3.4 In reviewing the internal controls and subsequently approving the Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25, the Joint Committee will require assurances on the effectiveness of the governance framework and how this addresses the key risks faced by the partner authorities.
- 3.5 In order to provide that assurance, the Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25 has been produced taking into account the guidance and best practice contained within the Framework and is set out in **Appendix A** to this report.
- 3.6 Members should note that whilst the attached Annual Governance Statement is for the Revenues and Benefit Shared Service, Preston City Council (the Host) publishes an Annual Governance Statement reporting on the governance arrangements for the whole authority. See following link: [Unaudited Statement of Accounts 2024/25](#) . The draft Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25 is set out from between pages 99 to 116. This sets out in more detail the governance arrangements in place during 2024/25.
- 3.7 A summary table documenting recent housing benefit subsidy audits and internal audit work undertaken in relation to the Shared Service is provided in **Appendix B** as further assurance.
- 3.8 An extract of the Risk Log is provided in **Appendix C** as further assurance, detailing mitigation in relation to the main risks that would have a significant impact for the Shared Service.

4. Implications

- 4.1 Financial planning and management is a key component of effective corporate governance. All financial implications are reflected in the (Unaudited) Annual Statement of Accounts 2024/25, also on the agenda for consideration by the Joint Committee.
- 4.2 Ensuring staff are adequately trained and professionally competent is key to meeting the core needs of the CIPFA/SOLACE guidance.
- 4.3 Risk is intrinsic to the system of internal audit and governance and mitigation of those risks are covered within the Business Plan 2025-27.

5. Impact Statement

- 5.1 Good governance leads to good management, good performance, good stewardship of public money, good public engagement and ultimately good outcomes for citizens and service users. It enables the authority to pursue its vision effectively as well as underpinning that vision with mechanisms for control and management of risk. The Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25 provides the citizens and service users with evidence

of the effectiveness of the governance arrangements for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service.

Background Documents:

Background documents open to inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972:

Paper	Date	Contact/Directorate/Ext
"Delivering Good Governance in Local Government - Framework" (CIPFA/SOLACE)	2016	Jackie Wilding Director of Resources Tel: 01772 906994
Shared Service Business Plan 2025-27	2025	Andrew Taylor Assistant Director (Head of Revenues and Benefits) Tel: 01772 906013

Contact for further information:

Jackie Wilding Director of Resources Preston City Council	01772 906994	J.Wilding@preston.gov.uk
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REVENUES & BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

2024/25

1. Scope of Responsibility

1.1 The role of the Shared Revenues and Benefits Service Joint Committee (“the Joint Committee”) (under S101(5) and S102 of the Local Government Act 1972 and S20 of the Local Government Act 2000 and all other enabling powers) is to discharge the functions delegated to it by the Executives of Preston City and Lancaster City Councils, as specified in the Shared Revenues and Benefits Service Agreement (“the Agreement”). The Terms of Reference of the Joint Committee require;

- That those delegated functions relating to Revenues and Benefits are delivered through the Joint Committee within the budget and to agreed standards;
- That Preston City Council and Lancaster City Council remain fully informed and engaged

To this end the Joint Committee requires robust reporting and performance management arrangements in place that meet the requirements of each partner authority.

1.2 The “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework” is designed for local authorities and other public bodies which engage directly with the community. The Joint Committee’s lines of communication and accountability are different, but the principles of the Framework apply. To this extent, the Joint Committee is responsible, jointly with the partner authorities, for ensuring that there are sound systems of internal control in place to facilitate the effective exercise of their functions. These include arrangements for the management of risks and for maintaining high standards of corporate governance.

2. The Purpose of the Governance Framework

2.1 The governance framework outlines the systems, processes, culture and values by which the Joint Committee is directed and controlled, to ensure a quality, cost effective service is delivered to each partner authority.

2.2 The Joint Committee is not a free standing body in its own right. Appropriate arrangements for the good governance of its affairs must therefore be made, drawing upon the established good governance practices at both Councils.

3. The Governance Environment

3.1 As employees of Preston City Council, officers within the partnership are subject to the governance processes that are in operation at Preston City Council.

3.2 Reference should be made to the respective financial statements of each partner authority for full details of their corporate governance arrangements.

3.3 The following paragraphs describe the key elements of the systems, processes, and performance management arrangements which are in place and which constitute the system of governance which is specific to the Joint Committee.

4. The Shared Revenues and Benefits Service Agreement

- 4.1 The Agreement sets out the basis for the Shared Service and its operation. It sets out the standard and quality of services to be provided.
- 4.2 The Agreement provides that the Joint Committee be made up of two Executive Members from each partner authority. The Joint Committee meets at least two times in a municipal year and holds its Annual General Meeting every year before 31 July.
- 4.3 Advice is provided to the Joint Committee by the S151 Officers at both Lancaster City Council and Preston City Council. The Director of Resources at Preston City Council is considered the Secretary to the Joint Committee.
- 4.4 The Head of Shared Service provides performance monitoring reports to the Joint Committee upon request. Furthermore, the Head of Shared Service and the Section 151 Officer at Preston City Council present reports at each annual meeting of the Joint Committee providing the following details;
 - A statement showing key service objectives in the new business plan;
 - A summary of the revenue account and a statement of capital spending. This includes the distribution or use of any revenue surpluses and the financing of any capital expenditure; and in the event of a deficit, a statement of the corrective action taken or to be taken;
 - As and when required by the Chief Executive or the Section 151 Officer of each partner authority the Joint Committee shall produce such other reports as may reasonably be required.
- 4.5 A key requirement of the partnership is that it meets the key reporting timetables for each Council to ensure that it complies with all internal, external and statutory requirements.

5. Business Improvement Planning

- 5.1 The Shared Revenues and Benefits Service Agreement is supplemented by a Shared Service Business Plan ("SSBP") which sets out the specific projects and performance targets which need to be delivered in the forthcoming year.
- 5.2 In addition to the regular Joint Committee meetings the Head of the Shared Service reports periodically to the Section 151 Officer of each partner authority.

6. Risk Management

- 6.1 The risks associated with the delivery of the Shared Service are recorded in a Risk Log within the SSBP. The key risks facing the Shared Service at this stage of its development are;
 - ICT and associated systems - Maintenance and connectivity issues, causing disruption to IT systems
 - Reduction in quality of service and/or performance
 - Welfare Reform - Transfer of responsibility to DWP for housing costs, changing regulations:
- 6.2 The Risk Register has been reviewed as part of the process of compiling the SSBP and the Plan contains a range of actions aimed at mitigating these risks. An extract from the Risk Register is provided at **Appendix C**.

7. Workforce Planning

- 7.1 One of the key actions in setting up the Shared Service in 2011 was the implementation of a Workforce Strategy following staff consultation, which
- set out the core purpose, values and guiding principles for the partnership, in line with those of each partner authority, and
 - identified and addressed any staff development needs.
- 7.2 Workforce planning has helped to deliver quality and cost-effective services. The majority of the Shared Service improvements have been achieved because the right people with the right knowledge, skills and behaviours are deployed in the right positions throughout the structure. This philosophy continues to date.
- 7.3 At times of change, consultation takes place with frontline staff. They are fully involved and understand their role in the process, which provides re-assurance and commitment.
- 7.4 Long term workforce planning provides the opportunity to link training and development needs with future skill requirements. Strategies can then be devised to meet these needs. e.g. Universal Credit

8. Scrutiny & Audit

- 8.1 Accounts relating to the Shared Service are open to inspection by the Joint Committee and each partner authority. A key role of the Joint Committee is to ensure that effective external audit arrangements are in place and that each Council is able to carry out a meaningful scrutiny of its performance.
- 8.2 The internal audit service is delivered by an in-house team operating to professional standards as set out in the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. Internal audit for the Shared Service was previously predominantly provided by the Lancaster City Council Internal Audit service, assisted by the Preston team when required, but it has been agreed to share the workload over the next 12 months. Where appropriate, reports are issued separately to the Audit Committee of each partner authority.
- 8.3 The two Councils work to different assurance scales:
- Preston: Full; Substantial; Reasonable; Limited; Minimal
(from 2025 Substantial; Reasonable; Limited; No)
 - Lancaster (MIAA): High; Substantial; Moderate; Limited; No

9. Review of Effectiveness

- 9.1 The Joint Committee has a responsibility to review the effectiveness of its governance arrangements and to demonstrate continuous improvement. This is informed by the work of Members and the partnership's Senior Management Team. Additional assurance is provided by support services, the internal audit service and by any work of external audit.
- 9.2 The Business Plan contains performance data to show performance against agreed targets together with draft financial statements. Any service issues will be outlined for Members' consideration.
- 9.3 Officers strive for continuous improvement and review lessons learned from previous financial years.

Signatures

Chair of the Shared Services Joint Committee: _____

S151 Officers of the Partner local authorities: _____ (Lancaster)

_____ (Preston)

29th July 2025

Revenues & Benefits Shared Service

Subsidy Assurance & Internal Audit Reports Issued 2024/25 and additional evidence:

Note: The two Councils work to different assurance scales:

DWP Subsidy: Preston/Lancaster: “Certified” in relation to approved subsidy claim.

Internal Audit: Preston: Full; Substantial; Reasonable; Limited; Minimal
(from 2025 Substantial; Reasonable; Limited; No)

Lancaster (MIAA): High; Substantial; Moderate; Limited; No

Job No	JOB_TITLE	Report Date	Assurance Opinion	Assurance Opinion Text
DWP - BENEFITS:				
2022/23	DWP Subsidy Audit	23/05/2025	Certified	DWP confirmed that there were no financial implications resulting from a minor issue identified, and the HB Subsidy Claim was certified with no qualification. (£32.6m subsidy payment)
2023/24	DWP Subsidy Audit (Lancaster) KPMG Auditors	11/12/2024	Certified	DWP confirmed that there were no financial implications resulting from three minor issues identified, and the HB Subsidy Claim was certified with no qualification. (£24.9m subsidy payment)
	(Preston) KPMG Auditors		Ongoing	Audit currently being undertaken
2024/25	DWP Subsidy Audit (Lancaster) KPMG Auditors		Submitted	Awaiting Audit to start
	(Preston) KPMG Auditors		Submitted	Awaiting Audit to start – will need 23/24 to be finalised before 24/25 can commence

Job No	JOB_TITLE	Report Date	Assurance Opinion	Assurance Opinion Text

Internal Audit Work:

For the 2024/25 financial year several Audits were completed.

Job No	JOB_TITLE	Report Date	Assurance Opinion	Assurance Opinion Text
	Business Rates	16/05/24	Substantial	The Council has robust processes for establishing the business rates due after applying the appropriate reliefs. Reliefs and exemptions are awarded in line with latest policy requirements and legislation. It was confirmed that annual billing is conducted in a timely manner. In-year cash collections are reconciled monthly and allocated into the nominal ledger accounts accordingly. The Council has a Shared Service Revenues Recovery Policy which provides guidance on recovery process to be adopted to reduce debt and this was being adhered to. The generation of reminder letters and final notices was controlled by preset run dates which made them timelier and up to date. The Council uses outside Enforcement Agencies (EAs) who are performance managed through KPIs and quarterly liaison meetings. The Council has access to the EAs portal and therefore can view any account at any time.
	Corporate Fraud	04/09/24	Substantial	Our work has established that there is a sound system of control in place, with only 3 minor areas of control weakness identified.

Job No	JOB_TITLE	Report Date	Assurance Opinion	Assurance Opinion Text
	Housing Benefits Overpayments	18/12/24	Moderate	<p>Key findings and recommendations to address these areas of control weakness are detailed within the Management Action Plan. It is for these reasons that a substantial assurance rating can be placed on the control environment and the extent to which risks are mitigated regarding the management of Corporate Fraud.</p> <p>Overall, the audit identified that there was an adequate system of internal control, however, in some areas weaknesses in design and inconsistent application of controls put the achievement of some aspects of the system objectives at risk. Areas of good practice related to policies and procedures being in place around overpayments and related write offs. The policies and procedures were saved on a central teams file, this also included all key reports, guidance and overpayment data for staff to access. Areas of improvement related to training not being in place for assessment or recovery staff. The Shared Service was currently changing the performance monitoring process for overpayments due to the previous process being overly complex and so the current process did not match with the process stated in the policy. Processes for write offs were not in line with what was stated in the policy, and gaps were identified when sample testing</p>

Job No	JOB_TITLE	Report Date	Assurance Opinion	Assurance Opinion Text
	Council Tax	26/02/25	Substantial	<p>benefit overpayments and calculations. Small, low risk findings were identified in relation to policies and procedures.</p> <p>Our work has established that the following controls are in place and working effectively. • Annual billing timetable is produced, detailing key dates and allocation of duties. • A full annual billing process is undertaken prior to running it Live. • All refunds are checked by the team leader and approved by the senior officer. • Integrity batch jobs are run on the system at regular intervals. • System parameters are set, maintained, and checked regularly</p> <p>However, there are a couple of improvements to be made to strengthen the current operational arrangements. For these reasons, a Substantial assurance rating has been awarded for this review.</p>

REVENUES & BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE RISK LOG

	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
1.	ICT & Systems	Low	Critical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance contracts in place with demanding service levels. • Business continuity plans developed and tested. Resources utilised for home working arrangements. • PRINCE2 accredited ICT project managers. • Regular updates and de-briefs between project leaders, the project manager and heads of service. • Dedicated Account Managers for high profile systems. • Procured Capita Remote Support for Academy Systems. • Disaster Recovery testing frequently carried out
2.	Reduction in quality of service and/or performance	Low	Significant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuously review staff structure ensuring it remains fit for purpose. • Contingency plans in place to enable input of additional resources from either site to minimise risk during early stages. • Set realistic performance targets. • Overview by Joint Committee and S151 Officers.
3.	Welfare Reform	Medium	Significant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal Credit (i.e., transferring responsibility for paying housing costs from the LA to DWP) when forecasting staffing numbers required to perform the residual tasks associated with UC. • Lack of information on changes to the benefits systems from DWP and the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government poses a risk for Council's that they will not forecast income/ expenditure/resources accurately (in addition to grant cuts).