**Centre for Governance and Scrutiny**

**Strategy 2021-23**

**Our purpose**

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny’s (CfGS) purpose is to help organisations and decision-makers achieve their outcomes through improved governance and scrutiny.

**Our mission**

CfGS exists to promote better governance and scrutiny, both policy and practice, in a range of sectors. We work with national, regional and local organisations involved in the delivery of public services, publicly funded projects or those seeking to raise their standards of governance and scrutiny to bring public benefit and improve outcomes. We are a social purpose consultancy and charity.

Good governance is essential to supporting a culture, structure, systems and processes which lead to improved transparent, greater involvement and accountable decision-making.

Now, more than ever, we need trusted decisions. We also believe that a good governance framework should have an explicit oversight component to ensure the involvement of others in developing policy, providing challenge, holding to account and acting as a place to test ideas.

**How will we achieve our purpose and mission:**

CfGS will achieve its purpose and mission by:

1. Working with policy and decision-makers nationally and locally to raise governance standards, provide guidance and practical support to aid decision-making and improve outcomes.
2. Supporting organisations and individuals to create a culture which supports good governance, raises governance standards, responds to challenges and risks and provide innovative solutions.
3. Innovating in new areas to develop practical support, policy ideas and guidance which helps improve governance and scrutiny policy and practice.
4. Creating an environment in which our CfGS team (Trustees, staff and associates) feel respected, valued and can do their best work and we establish effective partnerships to help achieve our purpose.
5. Continuing to grow CfGS’ reach, offer and profile in order to achieve our purpose, diversify funding and remain sustainable.

**What strategic choices are we making?**

In 2016/17, we did a full review of our strategy reflecting the changing and challenging public services environment and our ambition to influence and impact on a broader range of sectors, on a broader range of issue.

A lighter touch review was carried out in 2020/21 by the team and Trustees to inform the refresh of the strategy, the following were seen as positive achievements:

* CfGS is seen as independent, value-driven, evidence-led and produces high quality analysis and recommendations. Our credibility and profile have grown with a wider offer and more work in different sectors.
* CfGS is defined by our ability and experience of navigating difficult and sensitive organisational and political contexts. Our range spans those requiring improvement or crisis support, to those seeking to innovate.
* CfGS is more financially robust with an appropriate, affordable operating model. We have more ongoing clients providing a more regular income.
* The change of organisation name in September 2020, to reflect our wider scope and range of expertise, was an important step in repositioning the organisation.

There have also undoubtedly been challenges and things we could have done differently during the last three years including:

* The operating context for all public services and charities has been difficult and unprecedented with financial pressures, political uncertainty and impact of the pandemic response. In 2020, this led to a downscaling of income ambitions, a reduction in staffing and a focus on in-house delivery.
* Progress was slower and more ad hoc than we originally anticipated particularly in branching out to new sectors. Maintaining a focus on business development alongside delivery with a small team remains a challenge.
* The time and effort involved in moving to a new operating model (with all team members employed by CfGS) was under-estimated but delivered significant cost savings. The process could have been started earlier.

Whilst the operating environment is likely to remain very challenging, CfGS is better positioned to respond to the risks and take advantage of opportunities. To achieve its ambitions over the next two years, the following principles will drive our work:

* Retaining and expanding our position as the leading advisory and research body to local government on all things scrutiny.
* Continuing to expand our role in assisting councils requiring improvement support or with complex governance problems, extending our governance offer and support on topical issues.
* Retaining and recruiting clients requiring ongoing support for scrutiny or similar oversight board development and support.
* Continuing to extend our reach into organisations and sectors responsible for delivering public services, publicly funded projects or seeking to raise their governance and responsible business standards.
* Establishing a broader ‘governance review’ offer in a wider range of sectors and growing business here. Building on our work with the RCN, housing associations and others, seek to grow our credibility and ability to bid for new work in this area.
* Accessing a wider source of research funding, building on the success of the governance risk project, Gambling Commission work and successful JRRT funding, with a clear link to our charitable aims and business development.

**To achieve our purpose, we will manage our work through an annual delivery plan which will see us:**

* Invest, support, value and reward our experienced, high calibre core team.
* Regularly review our governance and Board to ensure we are achieving the charity governance code and have the right diversity of skills and experience to deliver our ambitions.
* Have a clear focus on value and return on investment and a lean operating model with deliver through a core team and a network of experienced associates and partners.
* Maintain and grow our position as an influencer of legislation, policy and practice nationally and locally in relation to governance and scrutiny.
* Consolidate our relationships with government and key sector bodies in order to continue to be seen as the leading advisory body on governance and scrutiny in local government.
* Undertake a more targeted approach to research to support our policy, campaign and consultancy work.
* Seek to attract higher value fees/ support for research, grants and consultancy through developing narratives about our impact which have immediate salience.
* Be clear that we will only work with organisations, partnerships and individuals if they match our purpose and values and fit with our charitable objectives.

Everything we do will continue to be underpinned by our core values:

* **Outcome focused** – all our work is about improving people’s lives and places whilst providing good value for money.

* **Communicate compellingly** – we will communicate clearly, be open and honest, operate as one organisation, live our purpose/values, listen and respond to feedback.

* **Brave and driven** – we will be brave in taking a position, be creative in finding solutions, get voices heard, and challenge ourselves and others.

* **Trusted and valued** – we will be independent, evidence-led and focus on helping organisations achieve their goals.

**How will we judge our success?**

* We can evidence that we have made a positive difference in the organisations, places and with the people we work with.
* We can evidence that we have increased our influence by getting our voice heard on key issues relating to governance and scrutiny.
* Everyone involved with CfGS (team, Trustees, associates and partners) has a shared purpose, feels supported, respected and valued, and that it is a great organisation to be part of.
* We are financially robust and sustainable.

The annual delivery plan will set out the detail of how we will achieve our strategy, supported by a Board approved budget. Progress against this will be regularly reviewed by the CfGS Trustee Board.