Stevenage Borough Council
Local Code of Corporate Governance

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This Local Code is underpinned by the CIPFA/SOLACE *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework: 2016* and summarises policies, procedures, behaviours and values by which the council is controlled and governed.

The CIPFA/SOLACE *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework* sets the standard for local authority governance in the UK. The concept underpinning the framework is to support local government in taking responsibility for developing and shaping an informed approach to governance, aimed at achieving the highest standards in a measured and proportionate way. The purpose of the Framework is to assist authorities in individually reviewing and accounting for their own unique approach with the overall aim to ensure that:

- Resources are directed in accordance with agreed policy and according to priorities
- There is sound and inclusive decision making
- There is clear accountability for the use of these resources in order to achieve desired outcomes for service users and communities.

Good governance enables the Council to effectively achieve its intended outcomes, whilst acting in the public interest at all times.

The CIPFA/SOLACE *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework: 2016,* sets out seven core principles of governance as detailed in the diagram below. Stevenage Borough Council confirms its commitment through the adoption, monitoring and development of this Local Code of Corporate Governance.

Achieving the Intended Outcomes While Acting in the Public Interest at all Times

This diagram illustrates how the various principles for good governance in the public sector relate to each other. Principles A and B permeate the implementation of Principles C to G

Local Code of Corporate Governance

Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

Member and Officer Codes and Protocols
The standards of conduct and personal behaviour expected of Members and Officers of the council, its partners and the community, are defined and communicated through codes of conduct and protocols, such as Member/Officer Protocols, Officers' Code of Conduct and Members' Code of Conduct.

There is an expectation that Members will have regard for the seven principles of public life (the Nolan Principles), as set out in Section 26 of the Localism Act 2011. The seven principles of public life are selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. These principles are readily accepted by the council as underpinning all local government activity.

Organisational values and behaviours
The council has adopted a set of organisational values and these are underpinned by a behaviour framework for staff. The values are included in all staff development programmes, in the Appraisal and Personal Development process and in all HR policies.

Complaints regarding Member Conduct
Complaints about Members and allegations that a Member has breached the Code of Conduct would be dealt with by the Standards Committee and the Borough Solicitor (Monitoring Officer) under the Localism Act 2011. In addition, the Council has appointed an Independent Person, to consult on alleged breaches to the Member Code of Conduct.

Complaints regarding Officer conduct
Allegations that an officer has breached the Employee Code of Conduct are dealt with by the officer's Line Manager in the first instance, and, if escalation is required, the council's Disciplinary Policy and procedures would be instigated.

Constitution
The Council has an approved Constitution which details how the Council operates, how decisions are made, including delegation of decisions and the procedures that are to be followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent, lawful and accountable to local people. Each of the council's member committees have terms of reference and these are reviewed and updated to reflect any changes to legislative and regulatory requirements.

Standards Committee
The Council has a Standards Committee to ensure the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members of the council. The terms of the reference for this committee are contained in the council's Constitution.

Information needs of Members
Pre-committee briefings are held with Committee Chairs prior to committee meetings (as required). The Leader and Chief Executive have weekly one to one meetings. The Leaders of the two Opposition groups also have regular meetings with the Chief Executive. Strategic Directors meet with their relevant Portfolio Holders on a regular basis to brief them on all aspects within their remit.

Regulation Guidance
The council has developed policies and procedures to ensure that its officers act in accordance with relevant legislation in the performance of its functions, e.g.

- Anti-fraud and Corruption Policy
- Up to date Register of Interests
- Up to date Register of Gifts and Hospitality
- Whistle-Blowing Policy
- Contract Standing Orders
- Financial Regulations
- Procurement Policy

Ethical compliance
The council has a number of policies, plans and guidance agreed at Member level which includes ethical compliance and awareness, e.g. Local Plan, Corporate Procurement Policy, and Planning Policy.

Member and Officer Training
Member and Officer induction and training ensures Members and Officers are aware of their legal and ethical responsibilities.

Chief Financial Officer
The role of the Chief Financial Officer conforms to that set out in the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2015).

Monitoring Officer
The role of the council's Monitoring Officer (Borough Solicitor) conforms to Section 5(1) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Customer Feedback
A customer feedback system is in place to record feedback and complaints – learning from feedback & complaints facilitates effective monitoring of information provided by customers to review service quality. The council uses Gov-metric to identify customer satisfaction with council services.

Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Community Strategy
The Community Strategy, which is available to the public on the council's website, sets out the long-term vision of how we want Stevenage to be as well as the short term goals to achieve this. In producing the Strategy the council has taken into account a range of views from a variety of stakeholders.

Partnership Arrangements
The council has the following key Partnerships:

- Stevenage Together
- Stevenage Leisure Limited
- Stevenage First Partnership

The partnerships have been set up to improve the quality of life for all who live work and visit Stevenage.

Corporate Plan:
The council's Corporate Plan: Future Town, Future Council (2016-2020), which is available to the public via the council's website, sets out the Council's vision, outcomes and objectives the council wants to achieve over the Plan's five year lifespan. The Plan is based on feedback from the last Residents' Survey, Tenants Survey and other engagement activity.

Annual Report
An Annual Report is published that sets out the council's achievements against the outcomes and priorities in the Corporate Plan, reporting progress over the last year against planned objectives and setting out future plans.

Communication and Engagement
The council uses a variety of response methods, including the internet, social media and traditional methods such as surveys and focus groups.

A Residents Survey is carried out every two years inviting residents to share their views on the town and council services. The results are used to inform future service priorities and resource allocation, including budget setting. Housing Tenant surveys are also carried out as required.

The Chief Executive has a programme of staff communications, which includes regular staff 'roadshows' to brief and involve staff in the decisions that affect the future direction of the council.

The council's Corporate Communications Strategy, Let's Talk, sets out the process to ensure the council communicates its aims and achievements to all stakeholders.

Stakeholder attendance at council meetings
The press and public are admitted to all Council, Executive and Committee meetings, subject to the Access to Information Rules in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution.

Decision making practices
Reports are produced on a standard template to facilitate understanding and ensure they are supported by comprehensive assessment of the legal, financial, risk and other implications of any proposed recommendations. All reports with legal or financial implications are checked by the Borough Solicitor/Chief Financial Officer prior to consideration at committee. Other professional advice (where sought) is referred to in the report.

The council complies with its responsibilities as set out in the Constitution in relation to notice of meetings, publication of agendas and reports and access to information reflect the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Publication Scheme
The council aims to make as much information available on its website through its Publication Scheme. Exceptions to this are in relation to information that is subject to the exemptions set out in the Freedom of Information Act.

Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

Future Town, Future Council
The Future Town Future Council (FTFC) programme is guiding the Council in terms of its future strategic focus and resource allocation. The FTFC programme consists of nine key programmes that aim to deliver improved outcomes and real change for Stevenage residents.

Community Strategy
The Community Strategy (Stevenage 2021: Our Town, Our Future) is the main strategic plan for Stevenage Together. It outlines the partnership's vision and how the partnership will work together to improve Stevenage and contribute to the development of the town.

Corporate Plan:
The council's Corporate Plan: Future Town, Future Council (2016-2020) sets out the Council's vision and the outcomes and objectives the council wants to achieve over the Plan's five year lifespan. The Plan incorporates the council's FTFC ambitions, projects and the change programme. It guides the strategic policy framework for the council, ensuring that services consider the council's key priorities in service planning and resource allocation. A summary action plan has also been developed that communicates simply the key objectives to be achieved each year.

Equality Impact Assessments are completed prior to the development and delivery of policy, strategy, projects and services or prior to making decisions that could impact on people.

Local Plan
The emerging Local Plan sets out how Stevenage will develop in the future and guide development within the town until 2031.

HRA Business Plan
The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, the strategic plan for managing and maintaining the council's housing stock, sets out the council's short-to-medium term plans and priorities for the housing management service and provides a 30 year perspective on stock investment and financial planning.

Housing Energy and Sustainability Strategy (2015-2018)
The Housing Energy and Sustainability Strategy sets out how the council will improve both the energy efficiency of the council's housing stock and tenant wellbeing through a series of strategic aims and objectives.

Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

Medium Term Financial Strategy
The Medium Term Financial Strategy reflects the government's four year finance settlement 2016/17-2019/20 and also incorporates the project impact of new government initiatives and the council's FTFC programme.
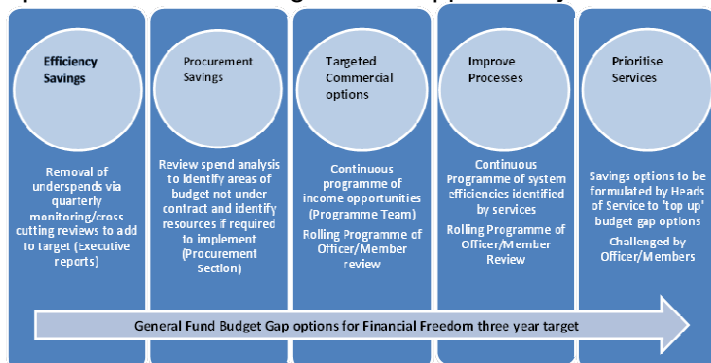
The council consults with local residents, partners and other stakeholders to seek their views on planning, prioritising and monitoring of services and the feedback has been used to inform budget setting and the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Leaders Financial Security Group
The Leaders Financial Security Group reviews the MTFS, savings and growth options prior to approval by the Executive and Council.

Priority Based Budgeting
The Priority Based Budgeting process for 2016/17 to 2018/19 incorporates a five pronged approach, as outlined in the diagram below. This approach, to meet the budget gap, widens the options for cash savings and is applied all year round.

Efficiency Savings	Procurement Savings	Targeted Commercial options	Improve Processes	Prioritise Services
Removal of underspends via quarterly monitoring/cross cutting reviews to add to target (Executive reports)	Review spend analysis to identify areas of budget not under contract and identify resources if required to implement (Procurement Section)	Continuous programme of income opportunities (Programme Team) Rolling Programme of Officer/Member review	Continuous Programme of system efficiencies identified by services Rolling Programme of Officer/Member Review	Savings options to be formulated by Heads of Service to 'top up' budget gap options Challenged by Officer/Members

General Fund Budget Gap options for Financial Freedom three year target

Capital Strategy
The Council has a five year Capital Strategy (to 2021/22) and the Asset Management Plan is being updated for the October 2017 Executive and will reflect the Future Town Future Council priorities. All capital schemes have been classified and prioritised to determine whether they should be included in the Capital Strategy. The Officers' Capital Group ensures that effective arrangements are in place for the design and delivery of capital projects.

Budget Monitoring
Key Financial Indicators are reported to senior management. The council undertakes a complete review of all revenue and associated budgets on a quarterly basis and any budget changes are reported quarterly to Executive. Assistant Directors receive budget monitoring reports each quarter.

Financial Regulations and Contract Standing Orders
Financial Regulations and Contract Standing Orders are reviewed as required, with any proposed amendments put forward to Council for approval.

Member Financial Training
Statement of Accounts and Treasury Management training is carried out as required for Audit Committee and Statement of Accounts Committee members.

Housing Management Board
The Housing Management Board acts as an advisory body to the Executive for council housing related matters, including participation in the HRA budget-setting process and the development of the HRA Business Plan.

Performance Management
Performance management arrangements are described under Principle F.

Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

Shared Service arrangements

The council has established shared service arrangements in order to provide service delivery benefits and added value, with other Hertfordshire local authorities as outlined below

- Internal Audit
- Housing Benefits and Local Taxation
- ICT, Print and Graphic Design, and Business Improvement
- Anti-Fraud.
- Building Control
- Legal (commencing 3/7/17)

Shared service arrangements for all the above shared services involve both Member and senior management oversight from all participating partners.

Research and benchmarking

In October 2013, the Local Government Association peer team carried out a corporate peer challenge at the council. The recommendations from the peer challenge have been incorporated into the FTFC programme.

The Housing Service is a member of HouseMark which delivers a robust and sophisticated data analysis and benchmarking service. A number of other services use research and benchmarking to inform service delivery.

Developing Member and Officer Capacity and Capability

The council has a number of measures and work streams in place to ensure member and officer capacity and capability. These include:
- An overarching People Strategy
- A workforce planning process
- A quarterly workforce report to senior management
- A HR Business Partnering service which supports the development and implementation of workforce plans
- A member development programme and a member induction programme
- A Leadership Programme for senior management.
- A Middle Manager Leadership and Management Development programme.
- Corporate Learning and Development Programmes
- An Appraisal Policy and Procedure
- An Apprenticeship programme

Job Descriptions

Job descriptions for senior management roles specify that they must support the Council's Executive in its strategic leadership role, providing clear, timely and effective advice and support as appropriate on strategic issues and initiatives.

Member/Officer Protocols

The Council has a 'Protocol for Relationships between Members and Officers' which has been approved by the Council's Standards Committee who monitor its operation.

Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

Risk Management Policy and Guide
The council has an approved Risk Management Policy and Guide for officers and a 'pocket, Risk Management Guide.' Member and Officer risk training is provided as required.

Corporate Risk Group
A Risk Management Group meets quarterly to oversee and review the reporting process and the development of the council's approach to risk. The Chair of Audit Committee and the Members' Risk Champion are members of this group.

Strategic Risk Management
Strategic risks are linked to the council's ambitions and priorities. The Strategic Risk Register is monitored, on a quarterly basis, by senior management to ensure levels assigned and mitigation proposed is appropriate and being delivered, then considered at Audit Committee. The Resources Portfolio Holder is the Council nominated Member Risk Management Champion and assists with embedding risk management in the business of the Council.

Operational Risk Management
Operational risk registers are developed and monitored by the relevant Assistant Director. Action plans are developed to mitigate key risks and delivery monitored. In addition, a process of operational risk peer challenge helps to embed and enhance the quality of operational risk management. Any risks identified for escalation to strategic level are added to the quarterly review of the Strategic Risk Register.

Programme Risk Management
Programme risks are identified for programmes and capital schemes. Risks are added to the Strategic Risk Register where appropriate. Governance arrangements are in place to facilitate senior management overview of more detailed programme risks.

Performance monitoring
Strategic insight data is captured through the monitoring of two programmes. The Future Town, Future Council programme provides an update on progress being made across nine FTFC programmes. The corporate programme includes key strategic measures that are monitored quarterly by the Executive and senior management. Improvement activity for the measures that are not achieving or forecast not to achieve target are discussed by senior management quarterly prior to Executive. In addition the Executive receive separate monthly updates on the council's financial position and quarterly overview reports.

Data Quality/Processing
The council has a Data Quality Policy which outlines the council's commitment to improving data quality and arrangements are in place to monitor the data quality of performance data.

Data processing protocols and agreement exist for council services which are required to share data with other bodies.

Overview and Scrutiny
The Council has an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and two Select Committees. The terms of reference of the Scrutiny committees meets statutory regulations. All Executive decisions are

subject to call-in by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee unless there is an overriding reason for urgency.

Audit Committee
Audit Committee, constituted in line with CIPFA best practice, comments on internal and external audit matters, as set out in the council's Constitution. The Committee is supported by an independent representative. The Committee receives training on the Statement of Accounts and Treasury Management processes as required.

Anti-Fraud and Corruption
A Shared Anti-Fraud service provides robust and resilient fraud prevention, detection and investigation service in relation to non-benefit and corporate fraud. The service updates Audit Committee every six months on the work it has carried out.

The council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption and Whistle-Blowing Policies are both available on the council's intranet.

Data Protection
The Borough Solicitor has oversight of the council's responsibilities for compliance with the Data Protection Act 1988 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Data protection, Information Security and ICO guidance are available on the council's intranet. Procedures are in place for data protection breaches to be reported to Corporate Governance Group.

Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability

Annual Report
An Annual Report is published that sets out the council's achievements against the outcomes and priorities in the Corporate Plan, reporting progress over the previous year against planned objectives and setting out future plans.

Annual Governance Statement
The council produces an Annual Governance Statement, which is reported to Audit Committee and approved by the Statement of Accounts Committee. The Annual Governance Statement contains information regarding the effectiveness of the council's governance, risk management arrangements and control provided by the internal auditor.

The council monitors governance arrangements for shared services and this is reflected in the Annual Governance Statement.

Data Transparency Code
Information required for publication in Part 2 of the Code is published on the council's website and updated in line with publication guidelines.

Publication Scheme
The council aims to make as much information available on its website through its Publication Scheme as possible. Exceptions to this will be information that is subject to the exemptions set out in the Freedom of Information Act

Internal Audit

The council's internal audit provision is delivered by the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) hosted by Hertfordshire County Council. The service complies with CIPFA's Statement on the role of the Head of Internal Audit and operates to Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

The Head of Assurance confirms to Audit Committee the 'Fitness for Purpose' of internal audit to carry out the work that informs the assurance opinion each year.

For each audit, SIAS issues a Final Audit Report and this is signed off by management together with an agreement to implement the recommendations that have been made. Progress regarding implementation of audit recommendations is monitored by the Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager and areas of concern are escalated to Corporate Governance Group.

SIAS reports to Audit Committee quarterly regarding progress against the Audit Plan and the implementation status of high priority recommendations.

Website

The council's website follows common web standards and government guidelines to the World Wide Web Consortium Web Accessibility Initiative's 'Double A' standard.

Statement of Accounts

The Statement of Accounts, which are available to the public, contains the council's final accounts for the year and gives financial information on all the services, including shared services, provided by the council during the year, as well as the council's financial position at the year end. The Statement of Accounts is reported to Members at the Statement of Accounts Committee meeting and published annually as per statutory deadlines/requirements.

Annual Audit Letter

Each year the council's external auditors, in their Annual Audit, letter advise whether they consider the council's financial statement gives a true and fair view of the financial position of its expenditure and income for the year.