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AUDIT COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday, 4 June 2024

Time: 6.00pm,

Location: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

**Contact: Chris.Liasi
committees@stevenage.gov.uk**

Members: Councillors: C Veres (Chair), L Briscoe (Vice-Chair), P Bibby CC, R Boyle, L Guy, M Humberstone, T Plater, C Roopchand, A Wells and T Wren.
Mr Syed Uddin (Independent Co-opted Non-voting Member)

AGENDA

PART I

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MINUTES - 26 MARCH 2024

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 26th March 2024.

Pages 3 – 8

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

To note the Terms of Reference for the Committee, as agreed by the Annual Council meeting on 22 May 2024.

Pages 9 – 10

4. EXTERNAL AUDIT 2023/24 - PROGRESS REPORT

To consider a progress report on the Council's 2023/24 external audit from Azets.

Pages 11 – 20

5. ANNUAL ASSURANCE STATEMENT & INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

To consider the Annual Assurance Statement and Internal Audit Annual Report 2023/24 prepared by SIAS.

Pages 21 – 48

6. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2023/2024 AND LOCAL CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

To consider the Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 and Local Code of Corporate Governance.

Pages 49 – 106

7. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

To consider any Part I business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

8. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

To consider the following motions –

1. That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

2. That Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

9. PART II MINUTES - AUDIT COMMITTEE - 26 MARCH 2024

To approve as a correct record the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 26 March 2024.

Pages 107 - 108

10. STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

To consider the latest Strategic Risk Register.

Pages 109 - 121

11. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

To consider any Part II business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 26 March 2024

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Maureen McKay (Chair), Carolina Veres (Vice-Chair), Stephen Booth, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Nazmin Chowdhury, Alex Farquharson, Graham Lawrence CC and Tom Wren.
Mr Syed Uddin – Independent Co-opted Non-voting Member.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 6.58pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence had been received from Baroness Taylor, and there were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 6 FEBRUARY 2024 AND 28 FEBRUARY 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meetings of the Audit Committee held on 6 February 2024 and 28 February 2024 be approved as correct records and signed by the Chair, subject to the name of Syed Uddin (Independent Member) being added to the attendance list for the 6 February 2024 meeting.

3 **2021/22 AND 2022/23 VALUE FOR MONEY AUDITS - INTERIM REPORT**

The Committee considered an interim report on the 2021/22 and 2022/23 Value for Money audits prepared by Ernst & Young.

The report gave interim commentary on the Value for Money (VFM) arrangements for 2021/22 and 2022/23 for Stevenage Borough Council. The commentary explained the work that had been undertaken during the year and highlighted any significant weaknesses identified along with recommendations for improvement. The commentary covered findings for audit years 2021/22 and 2022/23.

Karen Cunanan (Ernst & Young) explained that the reporting criteria included the identification of any significant weaknesses in respect of financial sustainability, governance, and improving the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the Council. No significant weaknesses had been identified for 2021/22 and 2022/23 against any of these criteria. Details were set out in the report.

Councillors queried whether or not a decision, when it was reached, was based on the information provided by the Council or was there a comparison with similar information provided by other local authorities. It was confirmed that decisions were

based on information provided by the Council to the external auditor.

It was **RESOLVED** that Ernst & Young's Interim Report on the 2021/22 and 2022/23 Value for Money audits be noted.

4 **LOCAL AUDIT DELAYS - UPDATE MARCH 2024**

The Assistant Director (Finance) updated Members with current proposals from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to address the backlog of local government audits in England and how these proposals may impact the Council.

The Assistant Director (Finance) brought Members up to date on local delays as a significant number of councils were behind schedule. Consultation had taken place to try reset the delays for the audits and to clear the backlog.

- It was explained proposals from 30 September 2024 any outstanding audits would stop, and a disclaimer would be given to councils by external auditors for the years of accounts that had not been completed.
- Councils had until 31 May to publish draft statements of accounts, following which there was a whole year for them to be audited.
- By 2027/28 all statement of accounts would be completed by the end of November
- It was explained once that was completed, the longer term plan would be how to present the accounts and when.
- CIPFA was consulting on the 2023/24 and 2024/25 accounts with a view to making them easier to present.

The Assistant Director (Finance) reported that Azets had commenced interim work on the 2023/24 SBC accounts, and would be returning to carry out further work during the summer, with a view to reporting the audited Statement of Accounts to the Audit Committee/Statement of Accounts Committee in late November 2024.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

5 **SHARED ANTI-FRAUD SERVICE (SAFS) PROPOSED ANTI-FRAUD PLAN 2024/25**

The Committee considered the Shared Anti-Fraud Service's proposed Anti-Fraud Plan for 2024/25. The purpose of the report was to provide Members with details of the Council's Anti-Fraud Plan for 2024/25.

The Shared Anti-Fraud Manager went into detail about the plan of work that would be conducted, how it would be funded, and he provided details of work activity across the authority and SAFS. He explained that it was a similar Plan to the current year and followed CIPFA and National Audit Office best practice. The Plan was set out at Appendix A to the report and the Key Performance indicators for 2024/25

were set out in Appendix B.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS) Anti-Fraud Plan for 2024/25, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved.

6 **PROGRESS ON SAFS ANTI-FRAUD PLAN 2023/24**

The Committee considered progress on the SAFS Anti-Fraud Plan 2023/24. Recent reports were provided to officers and were being used by SAFS to ensure that the Council was aware of its fraud risks and ways to mitigate or manage these effectively wherever possible.

- The Shared Anti-Fraud Manager explained that E-Learning mandatory training was delivered to staff and over 90 officers and Members had been trained.
- There was an increase in allegations of fraud, particularly around housing and council tax. This was a common issue with authorities owning their own housing stock, and would be monitored closely
- It was mentioned there was a typographical error within the report and that there were only 29 (not 305) live cases for Stevenage Borough Council.
- The number of cases of tenancy fraud currently being investigated had been reduced to 6.
- The KPI target of the recovery of 12 properties unlawfully used by tenants had not been reached, although 6 properties had been recovered. It was assured to Members they these were being dealt with as swiftly as possible.
- The number of SAFS days of counter fraud activity stood at 297 against a target of 450, although accurate reporting had been affected by problems with a new Case Management System, as previously reported to the Committee. This issue had been resolved and it was hoped that more accurate time recording would be implemented for 2024/25.

Members queried what the criteria was for the allocation of SAFS days for the Council. It was explained that the number of days for each partner authority was in proportion to their respective level of financial contribution to SAFS
In reply to a question, the SAFS Manager confirmed that the Team was fully resourced.

In response to a further question, the SAFS Manager commented that tenancy fraud cases could often be protracted, with some taking up to 18 months to resolve. It was **RESOLVED** that the progress made by the Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS) on delivering the 2023/24 Anti-Fraud Plan be noted.

7 **SHARED INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE (SIAS) INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2024/25**

The Committee considered the proposed Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25.

- The SIAS Client Audit Manager stated that the report set out the approach, such as consultation with key stakeholders which had resulted in a draft work plan.
- Paragraph 2.4 in the report provided a summary of the areas that would be covered in 2024/25.
- Appendix A to the report showed the list of audits proposed.

A Member queried based on the documentation that there was no mention of councillors in drawing up the Plan. It was explained that this would not be customary practice.

In response to an enquiry about billable audit days, the SIAS Client Audit Manager commented that bills were sent to each partner authority on a quarterly basis.

It was **RESOLVED** that the SBC Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25, as set out in the report, be approved.

8 **CORPORATE GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS**

The assessment of Corporate Governance arrangements was considered by the Committee. The purpose of the report was to inform Members of the Audit Committee of the activity carried out in 2023/24 to strengthen the Council's corporate governance arrangements and advise of the corporate governance activity identified for 2024/25, for inclusion in the Council's 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement.

Councillor Booth stated it would be useful to raise Members' awareness of corporate governance by way of further training. Officers noted this request.

It was **RESOLVED** that the progress on corporate governance enhancement activity during 2023/24; and the corporate governance activity identified for 2024/25, for inclusion in the Council's 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement, be noted.

9 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

There was no urgent Part I business.

10 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. That Members considered the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and maintained the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

11 **STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER**

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer presented a report providing the Quarter 3 2023/24 (October to December 2023) update in respect of the Strategic Risk Register.

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer, assisted by the Assistant Director (Finance), responded to a number of questions raised by Members on the report.

It was **RESOLVED** that the latest Strategic Risk Register, as set out in the report, be noted.

12 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no urgent Part II business.

The Chair announced that this would be her final meeting of the Audit Committee. She thanked Members, officers, and external representatives for their support during her time as Chair. She gave her best wishes for the future to Councillor Graham Lawrence, who was not standing for re-election, and Ian Gourlay (Senior Democratic Services Officer), who was soon to be retiring.

CHAIR

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AUDIT COMMITTEE

1. Membership – 10 (+ 1 Co-opted Independent non-elected member) to include -

- Chair - A Member who is neither a Member of the Cabinet nor who serves as a Scrutiny Member
- 1 Member of the Cabinet only

2. Quorum - 4

3. Terms of Reference

3.1 To advise or comment as appropriate on –

a) Internal Audit matters, including:-

- The Annual Internal Audit Plan
- The adequacy of management responses to Internal Audit reports and recommendations
- The Audit Partnership Manager's Annual Report and Opinion
- To consider summaries of specific internal audit reports, as requested

b) External Audit matters, including-

- External Auditors plans for auditing and inspecting the authority
- The Annual Audit & Inspection Letter from the External Auditor
- The report to those charged with governance
- Proposals from the National Audit Office over the appointment of the External Auditor
- The scope & depth of External Audit work

c) Arrangements made for the co-operation between Internal Audit, external audit and other bodies.

d) Anti-Fraud & Corruption issues including the Council's policies on Anti-Fraud and Corruption, "whistle-blowing".

e) The Council's Annual Governance Statement.

f) The Council's Constitution in respect of Contract Standing Orders, Financial Regulations.

g) The Council's Risk Management arrangements.

h) The Council's arrangements for delivering value for money.

i) The Statement of Accounts and related Capital Determinations.

j) The Council's Treasury Management Strategy.

k) The Council's Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) Policy.

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Stevenage Borough Council

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Interim progress report

Year ended 31 March 2024

May 2024



Agenda Item 4

Your key team members

Paul Grady

Key Audit Partner

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Martha Charima

Manager

Martha.Charima@azets.co.uk

Tshego Dinalane

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Introduction

Adding value through the audit

All our clients demand of us a positive contribution to meeting their ever-changing business needs. Our aim is to add value to the Council through our external audit work by being constructive and forward looking, by identifying areas of improvement and by recommending and encouraging good practice. In this way, we aim to help the Council promote improved standards of governance, better management and decision making and more effective use of resources.

Purpose

This paper provides the Audit Committee with a report on progress in delivering our responsibilities as your external auditors.

The paper also includes:

- Details of progress made to date and whether it is on track
- Where progress is on track, any initial findings which may impact the final accounts audit

Members are invited to consider the progress reported in this paper and any actions considered necessary in response.

Auditor reporting delays for previous periods and the impact on our audit

Although we are planning to complete your audit for the year ended 31 March 2024 in line with the statutory timetable, so that we can report our initial findings to your Audit Committee in late 2024, please note that we will not be able to fully complete our audit, issue our auditor's report and certify the closure of the audit until your predecessor auditor has completed their audit for the year ended 31 March 2023. Once the 2023 audit has been completed, we will need to review the predecessor auditor's audit file to gain assurance over your opening balances as at 1 April 2023, and consider the impact on our audit of any modifications to their auditor's report.

Further, once the 2023 audit, and earlier years, has been completed, we will revisit our planning procedures and audit plan to assess whether any additional procedures are required over and above those we have previously identified in our audit plan. Should additional procedures or changes to the plan be required, we will report these to you. The cost of additional work to revisit planning upon completion of the prior year audits will also be reported to you.

Introduction

Council responsibilities

The Council has responsibility for:

- Preparing financial statements which give a true and fair view, in accordance with the applicable financial reporting framework and relevant legislation;
- Preparing and publishing, along with the financial statements, an annual governance statement and narrative report;
- Maintaining proper accounting records and preparing working papers to an acceptable professional standard that support its financial statements and related reports disclosures; and
- Ensuring the proper financial stewardship of public funds, complying with relevant legislation and establishing effective arrangements for governance, propriety and regularity.

Our expectations and requirements

In our audit plan, we set out the following requirements to enable us to deliver the audit in line with the agreed fee and timetable:

- Draft financial statements to be produced to a good quality by the deadlines you have agreed with us. These should be complete including all notes, the Narrative Statement, and the Annual Governance Statement;
- The provision of good quality working papers at the same time as the draft financial statements. These will be discussed with you in advance to ensure clarity over our expectations;
- The provision of agreed data reports at the start of the audit, fully reconciled to the values in the accounts, to facilitate our selection of samples for testing;
- Ensuring staff are available and on site (as agreed) during the period of the audit;
- Prompt and sufficient responses to audit queries within two working days (unless otherwise agreed) to minimise delays.

Audit progress

Continued progress of the audit

We have held meetings with the Chief Finance Officer and Chief Executive, as well as made enquiries of the Chair of the Audit Committee to inform our planning.

Our work included, but was not limited to, the following:

- Page 15
- Review of the entity's control environment and understanding of the financial systems;
 - Value for money risk assessment and planning;
 - Preliminary going concern assessment;
 - Review of internal audit reports;
 - Review and understanding of IT general controls;
 - Planning inquiries of management;
 - Payroll testing and reports up to Month 9;
 - Preliminary analytical review;
 - Population cleansing;

Because the council doesn't map its Month 9 General Ledger to the Trial Balance and Accounts, we have not been able to undertake any early interim testing.

Engagement with management has been positive and constructive and we have received responses to a range of planning enquiries and requests, enabling us to progress our planning and interim work. The finance team has been responsive and supportive and has enabled us to progress a substantial proportion of our work.

There are no matters arising which we consider to be RED rated.

Where information has been received and audit work has been performed, this is subject to management review. We have not at this stage identified any adverse findings to report to you.

Should anything arise from our finalisation of the planning procedures that changes the risks or planned procedures, we will report these to you.

Audit work plan tracker

KEY:

RED:

Information required significantly delayed and statutory deadline may not be met / significant issue identified as finding

AMBER:

Information required is delayed / issue identified

GREEN:

Information required received and audit on track / no significant adverse findings or issues identified

Planned activity	Progress	Issues, impact and actions	Progress	Findings
Planning inquiries with management	Responses received.	No issues identified		
Planning inquiries with Those Charged With Governance	Responses received.	No issues identified		
Value for money risk assessment and planning	Responses received.	No issues identified		
Opening balance testing	This will be completed once the predecessor auditor has concluded their prior year audits.	Once the 2023 audit, and earlier years, has been completed, we will revisit our planning procedures and audit plan to assess whether any additional procedures are required over and above those we have previously identified in our audit plan. Should additional procedures or changes to the plan be required, we will report these to you. The cost of additional work to revisit planning upon completion of the prior year audits will also be reported to you.		TBC
Population cleansing	The council does not map its Month 9 transactions to the GL and Accounts; hence, work in this section will be performed at year end.	We have been unable to select interim samples; hence we will do so at year end.		TBC

Audit work plan tracker

Planned activity	Progress	Issues, impact and actions	Progress	Findings
IT General controls	Work is currently in progress	At the time of writing this report, no errors or issues have been identified.	AMBER	TBC
Walkthroughs	Responses received and work is in progress but on track. PPE and Pensions walkthroughs can only be fully completed at year and this work is scheduled to be completed during the final accounts visit. Journals walkthrough has been completed and is now subject to management review.	No issues identified	GREEN	GREEN
Preliminary going concern assessment	Responses received.	No issues identified	GREEN	GREEN
Review of prior year accruals	We have received information and testing is still on-going.	At the time of writing this report, no errors or issues have been identified.	AMBER	TBC
Employee remuneration starters and leavers testing	We have received information and testing is still on-going.	At the time of writing this report, no errors or issues have been identified.	AMBER	TBC
Management judgements and estimates	Responses received and work completed	No issues identified.	GREEN	GREEN

KEY:

RED: Information required significantly delayed and statutory deadline may not be met / significant issue identified as finding

AMBER: Information required is delayed / issue identified

GREEN: Information required received and audit on track / no significant adverse findings or issues identified

Audit work plan tracker

Planned activity	Progress	Issues, impact and actions	Progress	Findings
Response to other planning inquiries	Responses received.	No issues identified	GREEN	GREEN
Review of predecessor auditor files	We will perform the review of the predecessor auditor file once the March 2023 accounts are signed off	Prior year audit is still ongoing	AMBER	TBC
Responses to preliminary analytical review queries	Responses received.	At the time of writing this report, no errors or issues have been identified	AMBER	TBC
Review of internal audit	Responses received.	No issues identified.	GREEN	GREEN

KEY:

RED: Information required significantly delayed and statutory deadline may not be met / significant issue identified as finding

AMBER: Information required is delayed / issue identified

GREEN: Information required received and audit on track / no significant adverse findings or issues identified

Audit work plan tracker

Planned activity	Progress	Issues, impact and actions	Progress	Findings
Review of the commercial income strip's accounting treatment	We will be requesting a paper from management detailing their assessment of the commercial income strip and setting out the accounting rationale and key assumptions. This will be subject to technical review.	We request this is prepared ahead of the final accounts visit to enable us to commence our review of this ahead of final accounts.	N/A	TBC
Group accounts	We will be requesting from management a group accounts and consolidation working paper to enable us to review the group arrangements and finalise group materiality at final accounts.	We request this is prepared ahead of the final accounts visit to enable us to commence our review of this ahead of final accounts.	N/A	TBC

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KEY:

- RED:** Information required significantly delayed and statutory deadline may not be met / significant issue identified as finding
- AMBER:** Information required is delayed / issue identified
- GREEN:** Information required received and audit on track / no significant adverse findings or issues identified

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Stevenage Borough Council
2023/24 Annual Assurance Statement and
Internal Audit Annual Report

4 June 2024

Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

Note the Annual Assurance Statement and Internal Audit Annual Report

Note the results of the self-assessment required by the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP)

Approve the SIAS Audit Charter 2024/25

Seek management assurance that the scope and resources for internal audit were not subject to inappropriate limitations in 2023/24

Contents

1. Purpose and Background
 - 1.1 Purpose
 - 1.2 Background

2. Annual Assurance Statement for 2023/24
 - 2.1 Context
 - 2.2 Control Environment
 - 2.4 Review of Effectiveness - compliance with the PSIAS and QAIP
 - 2.10 Confirmation of independence of internal audit and assurance on limitations
 - 2.11 Assurance Opinion on Internal Control
 - 2.12 Assurance Opinion on Corporate Governance and Risk Management

3. Overview of Internal Audit Activity at the Council in 2023/24

4. Performance of the Internal Audit Service in 2023/24
 - 4.1 Performance Indicators
 - 4.2 Service Developments

5. Audit Charter 2024/25

Appendices

- A Final position against the Council's 2023/24 Audit Plan

- B Definitions of Assurance Recommendation Priority Levels

- C Position against Public Sector Internal Audit Standards as of April 2024

- D Internal Audit Charter 2024/25

1. Purpose and Background

Purpose of Report

1.1 This report:

- a) Details the Shared Internal Audit Service's (SIAS) overall opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of Stevenage Borough Council's (the Council) framework of governance, risk management and control. Reference is made to significant matters and key themes.
- b) Shows the outcomes of the self-assessment against the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) incorporating the requirements of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP).
- c) Summarises the audit work that informs this opinion.
- d) Shows SIAS performance in respect of delivering the Council's audit plan.
- e) Presents the 2024/25 Audit Charter for approval.

Background

- 1.2 A key duty of the Chief Audit Executive (the Council's Client Audit Manager) is to provide an annual internal audit opinion, concluding on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control. This opinion informs the conclusions of the Council's Annual Governance Statement.
- 1.3 The assurance opinion in this report is based on internal audit work undertaken during 2023/24. The Audit Plan continued to give sufficient assurance on the Council's management of its key risks. Also considered is any relevant work undertaken in 2024/25 before the Audit Committee report deadline.
- 1.4 The associated definitions for the opinions of Substantial, Reasonable, Limited and No assurance, can be found within Appendix B of this report.
- 1.5 SIAS is grateful for the co-operation and support it has received from Council officers during 2023/24.

2. Annual Assurance Statement 2023/24

Context

Scope of responsibility

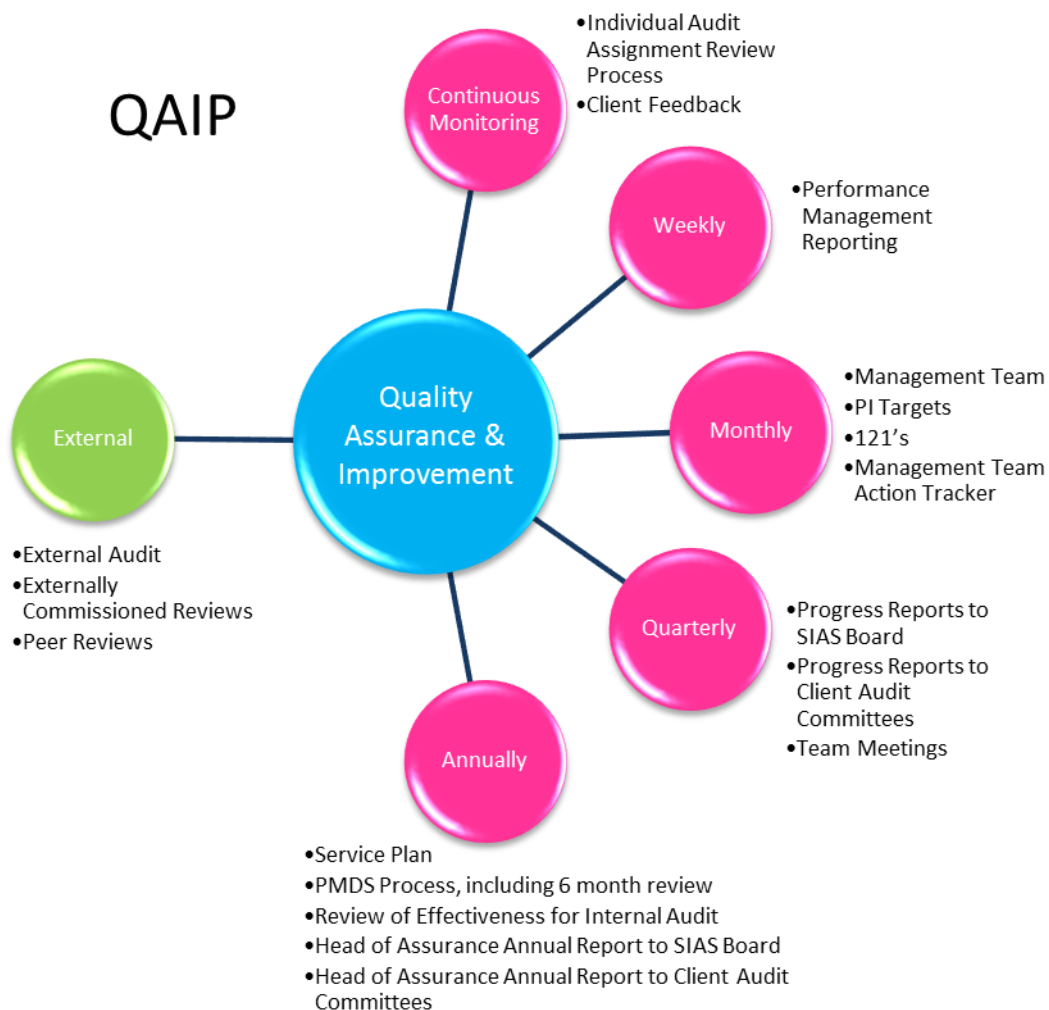
- 2.1 Council managers are responsible for ensuring Council business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently, and effectively. They are also responsible for ensuring internal controls are robust and risk management arrangements are appropriate.

Control environment

- 2.2 The control environment comprises three key areas: governance, risk management, and internal control. Together these aim to manage risk to an acceptable level, but it is accepted that it is not possible to eliminate it.
- 2.3 A robust control environment helps ensure that the Council's policies, priorities, and objectives are achieved.

Review of effectiveness

- 2.4 The Client Audit Manager must confirm annually that the internal audit function is suitably qualified to carry out the work that informs the assurance opinion.
- 2.5 As part of our Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme, a self-assessment was conducted against the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). The PSIAS encompass the mandatory elements of the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors (CIIA) International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF). They promote professionalism, quality, consistency, and effectiveness of internal audit across the public sector. They also highlight the importance of robust, independent, and objective internal audit arrangements to provide senior management with the key assurances needed to support them in both managing the organisation and producing the Annual Governance Statement.
- 2.6 The PSIAS also requires that the SIAS be subject to an external quality assessment (EQA) at least once every five years. This should be conducted by a qualified, independent assessor or assessment team from outside the organisation. This review was last completed in June 2021, with the result of the assessment reported to the Audit Committee in February 2022.
- 2.7 Based on the results of the 2024/25 PSIAS self-assessment, the Client Audit Manager has concluded that SIAS 'generally conforms' to the PSIAS, including the Definitions of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics, and the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.
- 2.8 The self-assessment identified two areas of agreed non-conformance, these reflecting the unique nature of a partnership arrangement and are not considered material. These are detailed in Appendix C. There are no significant deviations from the Standards which warrant inclusion in the Council's Annual Governance Statement.
- 2.9 The SIAS QAIP includes both internal and external monitoring and reporting to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of internal audit activity and identify opportunities for improvement. The diagram below details the methods used to monitor and report on these. Detailed information outlining activity in each area is contained in the SIAS Audit Manual.



Confirmation of independence of internal audit and assurance on limitations

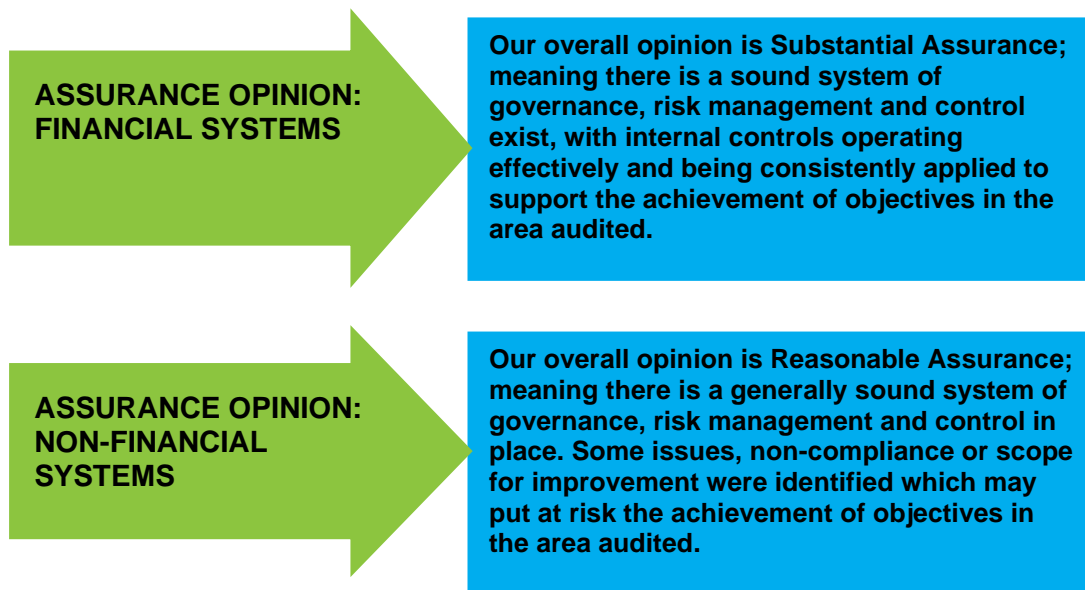
2.10 The Client Audit Manager confirms that during the year:

- No matters threatened SIAS's independence; and
- SIAS was not subject to any inappropriate scope or resource limitations.

Annual Assurance Statement for 2023/24

Assurance opinion on internal control

- 2.11 Based on the internal audit work undertaken at the Council in 2023/24, SIAS can provide the following opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's control environment, broken down between financial and non-financial systems.



Assurance opinion on Corporate Governance and Risk Management

- 2.12 SIAS has concluded that the corporate governance and risk management frameworks substantially comply with the CIPFA/SOLACE best practice guidance on corporate governance. This conclusion is based on the work undertaken by the Council and reported in its Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 and the specific reviews of Risk Management and Corporate Governance carried out by SIAS during the year.

**Simon Martin
Client Audit Manager
May 2024**

3. Overview of Internal Audit Activity at the Council in 2023/24

- 3.1 This section summarises work undertaken at the Council by SIAS in 2023/24. It highlights any significant internal control matters and opportunities for improvement.
- 3.2 Appendix A shows the final position against the Internal Audit Plan on 30 April 2024, assurance levels and the number of recommendations made. A summary of assurance levels and recommendation priorities is shown in the tables below (2022/23 data in brackets).

Assurance Level	Number of reports 2023/24 (2022/23 data in brackets)	Percentage of reports 2023/24 (2022/23 data in brackets)
Substantial	14 (12)	56% (43%)
Reasonable	7 (10)	28% (37%)
Limited	2 (1)	8% (4%)
No	0 (0)	0% (0%)
Unqualified	1 (2)	4% (8%)
Qualified	0 (0)	0% (0%)
Not Assessed	0 (1)	0% (4%)
Not Complete	1 (1)	4% (4%)
Total	25 (27)	100% (100%)

Recommendation Priority Level	Number of recommendations 2023/24 (2022/23 data in brackets)	Percentage of recommendations made 2023/24 (2022/23) data in brackets)
Critical	0 (0)	0% (0%)
High	8 (2)	19% (3%)
Medium	13 (25)	30% (42%)
Low	22 (32)	51% (55%)
Total	43 (59)	100% (100%)

- 3.3 **The Substantial assurance opinion overall on financial systems** has been concluded from eight financial systems audits. Seven received Substantial assurance and one received Reasonable assurance. No High priority recommendations were made across these audits. However, two Medium priority recommendations were made in the Housing Rents (former tenant arrears) audit.
- 3.4 **The Reasonable assurance opinion overall on non-financial systems** has been concluded from sixteen audits. Seven audits received

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Substantial assurance, six received Reasonable assurance and two received Limited assurance. One grant audit received an unqualified opinion. Eight High and eleven Medium priority recommendations were made across these audits.

- 3.5 In arriving at our Reasonable assurance opinion for non-financial systems, we highlight that 88% of opinions issued for individual audits during the year were assessed as Substantial or Reasonable assurance. This generally indicates the Council has satisfactory or good systems of internal control for a wide range of areas. However, it should be noted that there were some risks and impacts associated with control weaknesses in the Court Cost Tracking and Housing Property Services Contract Compliance audits, both receiving a Limited assurance opinion and containing two and six High priority recommendations respectively.
- 3.6 One audit was still in fieldwork at the time of writing this Annual Report. This audit has not contributed to the assurance opinion for 2023/24.

Critical and High Priority Recommendations

- 3.7 Members will be aware that a final audit report is issued when it has been agreed by management; this includes an agreement to implement the recommendations made. It is Internal Audit's responsibility to advise Members of progress on the implementation of Critical and High priority recommendations; it is the responsibility of Officers to implement the recommendations by the agreed date. Eight High priority recommendation was made within audits carried out during 2023/24. Members will continue to receive updates on the implementation progress of Critical and High priority recommendations through the SIAS quarterly progress reports to the Audit Committee.

4. Performance of the Internal Audit Service in 2023/24

Performance indicators

- 4.1 The table below compares SIAS's performance at the Council against the 2023/24 targets set by the SIAS Board.

Indicator	Target 2023/24	Actual to 31 March 2024	Notes
1. Planned Days – percentage of actual billable days against planned chargeable days completed (excludes unused contingency)	95%	95%	262 days delivered out of the 275 days planned
2. Planned Projects – percentage of actual completed projects to draft report stage against planned completed projects by 31 st March 2024	90%	96%	26 projects to draft or final report from the 27 planned

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3. Planned Projects – percentage of actual completed projects to final report stage against planned completed projects by the production of the Annual Report	100%	96%	26 projects to final report from the 27 planned
4. Client Satisfaction – percentage of client satisfaction questionnaires returned at 'satisfactory' level	100%	100%	23 questionnaires were issued during 2023/24, with all 10 returned questionnaires meeting the agreed target score
5. Number of High and Critical Priority Audit Recommendations agreed as a percentage	95%	100%	8 High priority recommendations made and agreed
6. Annual Plan – prepared in time to present to the March meeting of each Audit & Governance Committee. If there is no March meeting, then the Plan should be prepared for the first meeting of the financial year.	Achieved	Achieved	Presented in March 2024
7. Head of Assurance's Annual Report – presented at the first Audit Committee meeting of the financial year.	Deadline met	Met	The 2022/23 Annual Report was presented in June 2023

Service Developments

4.2 During 2023/24 the main service and development activities for SIAS included:

- a) **Recruitment** – Despite operating in a challenging recruitment market, SIAS have achieved significant success in filling our current vacancies. A new Assistant Client Audit Manager was recruited in June 2023, three Trainee Auditors during July 2023, a Client Audit Manager in September 2023, and a Senior Auditor and Auditor in February 2024. The above has allowed SIAS to reach an establishment vacancy rate of 0.5 FTE's, and as a result reduce any additional commissions to our co-sourced audit partner.
- b) **Training & Development** – As a service we continue to adopt our 'grow your own strategy' to provide the future talent for the Service and improve succession planning, in what remains a challenging recruitment market. Several members of the team have had a successful year in respect of progressing their professional qualifications. Two Auditors have recently completed their level 4 internal audit apprenticeship with merit and distinction grades. A further Auditor has passed several exams linked to an accountancy qualification (ACCA). Our three Trainee Auditors have all started their level 4 internal audit apprenticeship and this will continue into early 2025. In addition to the professional training above, the SIAS

management team continued to deliver a programme of lite bite training sessions linked to modern professional practice.

- c) **Commercial Strategy** – The SIAS Board agreed to plans for growing the service through new business (this was partly driven by the need to minimise inflationary pressures for existing partners). The internal audit marketplace is recognised as challenging for new entrants, largely due to relatively flat demand and well-established suppliers. Conservative targets for growth have therefore been set for 2024/25, with a suite of performance indicators to be reported to the SIAS Board on a quarterly basis to support their oversight of progress.
- d) **Management Information Systems** – During the final quarter of 2023/24, SIAS completed the re-procurement and implementation of a new timesheet recording system (Timely). This went live on 2 April 2024 and will provide the service with improved management information to support our capacity management and monitoring of the delivery of audit plans across the partnership.
- e) **Audit Practice** – as part of our continued work to adopt best practice from across the profession, our audit plans for 2024/25 included time allocations for the rolling out of new approaches to obtaining and providing assurance, including assurance mapping and embedded (or continuous) assurance.

5. Audit Charter 2024/25

- 5.1 The PSIAS require a local authority to formally adopt an Audit Charter which covers the authority and responsibility for an internal audit function.
- 5.2 The SIAS Audit Charter sets out the framework within which it discharges its internal audit responsibilities to those charged with governance in the partner councils. It details the permanent arrangements for internal audit and key governance roles and responsibilities to ensure the effectiveness of internal audit provision.
- 5.3 The Audit Charter is reviewed annually. Our review in May 2024 considered any key changes required due to the recent publication of the Global Internal Audit Standards, due for implementation by the 9 January 2025. Whilst the Charter remains broadly unchanged to that of the previous year and will not result in any fundamental changes to our existing approaches, we have included some minor additions for the purpose of clarity. The updated Charter is attached at Appendix D.

APPENDIX A – FINAL POSITION AGAINST THE COUNCIL’S 2023/24 AUDIT PLAN

Stevenage Borough Council Audit Plan – 2023/24

AUDITABLE AREA	LEVEL OF ASSURANCE	RECS *				AUDIT PLAN DAYS	STATUS/COMMENT
		C	H	M	LA		
Key Financial Systems							
Business Rates	Substantial	0	0	0	2	7	Final Report Issued
Council Tax	Substantial	0	0	0	2	7	Final Report Issued
Housing Benefits	Substantial	0	0	0	0	7	Final Report Issued
Creditors (risk & control mapping refresh)	Substantial	0	0	0	0	2	Final Report Issued
Debtors (risk & control mapping refresh)	-	-	-	-	-	0	Audit Cancelled
Treasury (risk & control mapping refresh)	Substantial	0	0	0	0	2	Final Report Issued (1)
Payroll & Expenses	Substantial	0	0	0	0	10	Final Report Issued
Housing Rents (former tenant arrears)	Reasonable	0	0	2	2	10	Final Report issued (1)
Cash & Banking (risk & control mapping refresh)	Substantial	0	0	0	0	2	Final Report issued
Operations & Corporate Themes							
Housing Regulator Reporting	Reasonable	0	0	0	0	12	Final Report Issued (1)
Community Grants & Funding	Reasonable	0	0	1	2	12	Final Report Issued

APPENDIX A – FINAL POSITION AGAINST THE COUNCIL’S 2023/24 AUDIT PLAN

AUDITABLE AREA	LEVEL OF ASSURANCE	RECS *				AUDIT PLAN DAYS	STATUS/COMMENT
		C	H	M	LA		
Communities External Commissions	Substantial	0	0	0	1	10	Final Report Issued
Land Charges	Substantial	0	0	0	0	10	Final Report Issued
S106 Spend Arrangements	Substantial	0	0	0	1	10	Final Report Issued
Court Cost Tracking	Limited	0	2	0	0	10	Final Report Issued (1)
Leaseholder Liability & Billing	Reasonable	0	0	0	3	13	Final Report Issued
Homeless B & B	-	-	-	-	-	2	Audit Cancelled
Wholly Owned Company (decision making)	Reasonable	0	0	1	3	12	Final Report Issued
Leisure Contract Management	Substantial	0	0	0	0	10	Final Report Issued (1)
Housing Property Services Contract Compliance	Limited	0	6	6	0	20	Final Report Issued (1)
Risk Management	Substantial	0	0	0	2	10	Final Report Issued (1)
Corporate Governance	Substantial	0	0	0	1	10	Final Report Issued
Performance Indicators	Substantial	0	0	0	3	10	Final Report Issued
Sickness Absence Management						12	In Fieldwork (2)

APPENDIX A – FINAL POSITION AGAINST THE COUNCIL’S 2023/24 AUDIT PLAN

AUDITABLE AREA	LEVEL OF ASSURANCE	RECS *				AUDIT PLAN DAYS	STATUS/COMMENT
		C	H	M	LA		
IT Audits							
Mobile Device Security	Reasonable	0	0	2	0	6	Final Report Issued (1)
IT Project Management	Reasonable	0	0	1	0	6	Final Report Issued (1)
Other Chargeable							
Grant Audit	Unqualified	0	0	0	0	2	Final Report Issued
2022/23 Projects Requiring Completion							
Debtors	Reasonable	0	1	1	1	2	Final Report Issued
Housebuilding & Acquisitions	Substantial	0	0	0	1	2	Final Report Issued
Strategic Support							
Head of Assurance Opinion	-	-	-	-	-	3	Complete
Audit Committee & Recommendation Follow Up	-	-	-	-	-	10	Complete
Client Engagement & Adhoc Advice	-	-	-	-	-	10	Complete
Audit Planning 2024/25	-	-	-	-	-	5	Complete

APPENDIX A – FINAL POSITION AGAINST THE COUNCIL’S 2023/24 AUDIT PLAN

AUDITABLE AREA	LEVEL OF ASSURANCE	RECS *				AUDIT PLAN DAYS	STATUS/COMMENT
		C	H	M	LA		
Service Development	-	-	-	-	-	5	Complete
Progress Monitoring	-	-	-	-	-	12	Complete
SAFS Related Matters	-	-	-	-	-	2	Complete
Contingency						25	
Total		0	8	13	22	300	

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(1) At Draft Report stage on 31 March 2024 / Final Report issued after year end.

(2) In Fieldwork at the time this report was written.

* Key to Recommendation Priority Levels: C = Critical priority recommendations; H = High priority recommendations; M = Medium priority recommendations; LA = Low/Advisory priority recommendations.

APPENDIX B – DEFINITIONS OF ASSURANCE AND RECOMMENDATION PRIORITY LEVELS

Audit Opinions		
Assurance Level	Definition	
Assurance Reviews		
Substantial	A sound system of governance, risk management and control exist, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited.	
Reasonable	There is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited.	
Limited	Significant gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance were identified. Improvement is required to the system of governance, risk management and control to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.	
No	Immediate action is required to address fundamental gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance identified. The system of governance, risk management and control is inadequate to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.	
Not Assessed	This opinion is used in relation to consultancy or embedded assurance activities, where the nature of the work is to provide support and advice to management and is not of a sufficient depth to provide an opinion on the adequacy of governance or internal control arrangements. Recommendations will however be made where required to support system or process improvements.	
Grant / Funding Certification Reviews		
Unqualified	No material matters have been identified in relation the eligibility, accounting and expenditure associated with the funding received that would cause SIAS to believe that the related funding conditions have not been met.	
Qualified	Except for the matters identified within the audit report, the eligibility, accounting and expenditure associated with the funding received meets the requirements of the funding conditions.	
Disclaimer Opinion	Based on the limitations indicated within the report, SIAS are unable to provide an opinion in relation to the Council's compliance with the eligibility, accounting and expenditure requirements contained within the funding conditions.	
Adverse Opinion	Based on the significance of the matters included within the report, the Council have not complied with the funding conditions associated with the funding received.	
Recommendation Priority Levels		
Priority Level	Definition	
Corporate	Critical	Audit findings which, in the present state, represent a serious risk to the organisation as a whole, i.e. reputation, financial resources and / or compliance with regulations. Management action to implement the appropriate controls is required immediately.
Service	High	Audit findings indicate a serious weakness or breakdown in control environment, which, if untreated by management intervention, is highly likely to put achievement of core service objectives at risk. Remedial action is required urgently.
	Medium	Audit findings which, if not treated by appropriate management action, are likely to put achievement of some of the core service objectives at risk. Remedial action is required in a timely manner.
	Low	Audit findings indicate opportunities to implement good or best practice, which, if adopted, will enhance the control environment. The appropriate solution should be implemented as soon as is practically possible.

APPENDIX C – POSITION AGAINST PUBLIC SECTOR INTERNAL AUDIT STANDARDS AT APRIL 2024 – ACTION PLAN

Section A: Conformance - All areas apart from those identified in Section B below were conforming.

Section B: Intentional Non-Conformance

Ref	Area of Non-Conformance with the Standard	Commentary	
3.1a	<p>Purpose, Authority and Responsibility</p> <p>Does the board (defined as the Audit Committee) approve decisions relating to the appointment and removal of the Chief Audit Executive (CAE)?</p>	<p>The Head of Assurance, Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), in consultation with the Board of the Shared Internal Audit Services approves decisions relating to the appointment and removal of the CAE.</p> <p>This is as provided for in the governance of the Shared Internal Audit Service.</p>	<p>Non-conformance</p> <p>No further action proposed. The current arrangements are considered effective given the shared nature of SIAS.</p>
3.1c	<p>Purpose, Authority and Responsibility</p> <p>Does the chief executive or equivalent undertake, countersign, contribute feedback to or review the performance appraisal of the CAE?</p>	<p>The performance appraisal is carried out by the Head of SIAS (HCC).</p>	<p>Non-conformance</p> <p>No further action proposed. The appraisal process was carried out by the Head of SIAS (HCC). The current arrangements are considered effective given the shared nature of SIAS.</p>



SIAS Audit Charter 2024/2025

1. Introduction and Purpose

- 1.1. Internal auditing is an independent and objective assurance and consulting activity. It is guided by a philosophy of adding value to the operations of an organisation. It assists a council in achieving its objectives and ultimately provides assurance to the public by systematically evaluating and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of risk management, control, and governance processes.
- 1.2. The purpose of the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) is to provide independent, objective assurance and consulting services designed to add value and improve client operations. The mission of internal audit is to enhance and protect organisational value by providing risk-based and objective assurance, advice, and insight. SIAS helps clients accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of governance, risk management, and control processes.

2. Statutory Basis of Internal Audit

- 2.1. Local government is statutorily required to have an internal audit function. The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require that 'a relevant authority must undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance'.
- 2.2. In addition, a council's Chief Finance Officer has a statutory duty under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 to establish a clear framework for the proper administration of the authority's financial affairs. To fulfil this requirement, the S151 Officer relies, amongst other sources, upon the work of internal audit.
- 2.3. The above provides the mandate for the provision of an Internal Audit function within each SIAS partner in accordance with the Global Internal Audit Standards.

3. Role

- 3.1. SIAS internal audit activity is overseen by Stevenage Borough Council's committee charged with fulfilling audit committee responsibilities, herewith referred to as the Audit Committee. As part of its oversight role, the Audit Committee is responsible for defining the responsibilities of SIAS via this Charter.

3.2. SIAS may undertake additional consultancy activity requested by management. The Client Audit Manager will determine such activity on a case-by-case basis, assessing the skills and resources available. Significant additional consultancy activity not already included in the Internal Audit Plan will only be accepted and carried out following consultation with the Audit Committee.

4. Professionalism

4.1. SIAS governs itself by adherence to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). These standards include the Definition of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics, and the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing (IPPF). They set out the fundamental requirements for the professional practice of internal auditing and the evaluation of the effectiveness of an internal audit function.

4.2. SIAS commits to adhering to the Global Internal Audit Standards. Revised Standards have recently been issued and the service is working towards the implementation date of 9 January 2025, or a likely extended date of 1 April 2025 for the public sector.

4.3. SIAS also recognises the Mission of Internal Audit as identified within the IPPF, 'To enhance and protect organisational value by providing risk-based and objective assurance, advice and insight' and the Core Principles for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing, which demonstrate an effective internal audit function, achieving internal audit's mission.

4.4. SIAS operations are guided by its operating procedures manual as well as applicable, Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors (CIIA) and Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Position Papers, Practice Advisories and Guides, and relevant council policies and procedures, including compliance with the Bribery Act 2010.

4.5. Should non-conformance with the PSIAS be identified, the Head of SIAS will investigate and disclose, in advance, if possible, the exact nature of the non-conformance, the reasons for it and, if applicable, its impact on a specific engagement or engagement outcome.

5. Authority and Confidentiality

5.1. Internal auditors are authorised full, free, and unrestricted access to all a client's records, physical property, and personnel as necessary to fulfil the internal audit mandate. All client employees are requested to assist SIAS in fulfilling its roles and responsibilities. Information obtained during an engagement is safeguarded and confidentiality respected in accordance with the Council's GDPR and information security policies.

5.2. Internal auditors will only use information obtained to complete an engagement. It will not be used in a manner that would be contrary to the law, for personal gain, or detrimental to the legitimate and ethical objectives of the client organisation(s). Internal auditors will disclose all material facts known, which if not disclosed could distort a report or conceal unlawful practice.

6. Organisation

- 6.1. The Client Audit Manager and their representatives have free and unrestricted direct access to Senior Management, the Audit Committee, the Chief Executive, the Chair of the Audit Committee, and the External Auditor. The Client Audit Manager will communicate with all the above parties at both committee meetings and between meetings as appropriate.
- 6.2. The Chair of the Audit Committee has free and unrestricted direct access to the Client Audit Manager.
- 6.3. The Client Audit Manager is line managed by the Head of SIAS who approves all decisions regarding the performance evaluation, appointment, or removal of the Client Audit Manager, in consultation with the Head of Assurance and SIAS Board.

7. Stakeholders

The following groups are defined as stakeholders of SIAS:

- 7.1. The Head of SIAS, working with the Client Audit Manager, both suitably experienced and qualified (CCAB and / or CMIIA), is responsible for:
 - hiring, remunerating, appraising, and developing SIAS staff in accordance with the host authority's HR guidance
 - maintaining up-to-date job descriptions which reflect the roles, responsibilities, skills, qualifications, and attributes required of SIAS staff
 - ensuring that SIAS staff possess or obtain the skills, knowledge, and competencies (including ethical practice) needed to effectively perform SIAS engagements
 - seeking approval from the SIAS Board for the level of human resources and finance required for SIAS to deliver services in accordance with its mandate
- 7.2. The Audit Committee is responsible for overseeing the effectiveness of SIAS and holding the Client Audit Manager to account for delivery. This is achieved through the approval of the annual audit plan, approval of performance targets set by the SIAS Board and receipt of regular reports. The Committee should champion the internal audit function to enable it to fulfil the purpose of internal auditing and pursue its strategy and objectives.
- 7.3. The Audit Committee is also responsible for the effectiveness of the governance, risk, and control environment within the Council, holding operational managers to account for its delivery.
- 7.4. Where stated in its Terms of Reference, the Audit Committee provides an annual report to the Council detailing the Committee's activities through the year. In addition, and as required, the Committee ensures that there is appropriate communication of, and involvement in, internal audit matters from the wider publicly elected Member body.

APPENDIX D – AUDIT CHARTER 2024/2025

- 7.5. The Client Audit Manager is responsible for ensuring that the outcome of all final Internal Audit reports is reported to all members of the Audit Committee, and Executive Members for Financial Sustainability, in a format agreed with these relevant parties.
- 7.6. Senior Management, defined as the Head of Paid Service, Chief Officers, and their direct reports, are responsible for helping shape the programme of assurance work. This is achieved through analysis and review of key risks to achieving the Council's objectives and priorities. Senior Management should also support recognition of the internal audit function throughout the organisation, and in providing full, free, and unrestricted access to all a client's records, physical property, and personnel as necessary to fulfil the internal audit mandate.
- 7.7. The SIAS Board is the governance group charged with monitoring and reviewing the overall operation of SIAS, with SIAS reporting key information to the Audit Committee within progress and annual reports, including:
- resourcing and financial performance
 - operational effectiveness through the monitoring performance indicators
 - any restrictions on internal audit scope, access, authority, or resources limiting the ability to carry out its responsibilities effectively.
 - the overall strategic direction of the shared service.
8. Independence and Objectivity
- 8.1. No element in the organisation should interfere with audit selection, scope, procedures, frequency, timing, or report content. This is necessary to ensure that internal audit maintains the necessary level of independence and objectivity.
- 8.2. As well as being impartial and unbiased, internal auditors will have no direct operational responsibility or authority over any activity audited. They will not implement internal controls, develop procedures, install systems, prepare records, or engage in any other activity that might impair their judgment.
- 8.3. When asked to undertake any additional roles/responsibilities outside internal auditing, the Client Audit Manager will highlight to the Audit Committee any potential or perceived impairment to independence and objectivity having regard to the principles contained within the PSIAS Code of Ethics as well as any relevant requirements set out in other professional bodies to which the Client Audit Manager may belong. The Audit Committee will approve and periodically review any safeguards put in place to limit any impairments to independence and objectivity.
- 8.4. Where SIAS has been required to provide assurance to other partnership organisations, or arm's length bodies such as trading companies, the Client Audit Manager and Head of SIAS will ensure that the risks of doing so are managed effectively, having regard to the Head of SIAS's primary responsibility to the management of the partners for which they are engaged to provide internal audit services.
- 8.5. The Client Audit Manager will confirm to the Audit Committee, at least annually, the organisational independence of SIAS.

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9. Conflicts of Interest

- 9.1. Internal auditors will exhibit clear professional objectivity when gathering, evaluating, and communicating engagement information. When forming judgments, they will make a balanced assessment of all relevant circumstances and not be influenced by their own interests or the views and interests of others.
- 9.2. Each auditor will comply with the ethical requirements of his/her professional body and proactively declare any potential conflict of interest, whether actual or apparent, prior to the start of an engagement.
- 9.3. All auditors sign an annual declaration of interest to ensure that the allocation of work avoids conflict of interest. Auditors who undertake consultancy work or are new to the team will be prohibited from auditing in those areas where they have worked in the past year. Audits are rotated within the team to avoid over-familiarity and complacency.
- 9.4. SIAS procures an arrangement with an external delivery partner to provide service resilience, i.e., additional internal audit days on request. The external delivery partner will be used to deliver engagements as directed by the Client Audit Manager in particular providing advice and assistance where SIAS staff lack the required skills or knowledge. The external delivery partner will also be used to assist with management of potential and actual conflicts of interest in internal audit engagements, providing appropriate independence and objectivity as required.
- 9.5. In the event of a real or apparent impairment of independence or objectivity, (acceptance of gifts, hospitality, inducements, or other benefits) the Client Audit Manager will investigate and report on the matter to appropriate parties.
- 9.6. Hertfordshire County Council's Head of Assurance not only leads and has overall management responsibility for SIAS, but also the similarly constituted Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS).
- 9.7. Given that SIAS will potentially undertake internal audit activity in relation to SAFS, this relationship is formally disclosed, and appropriate safeguards will be put in place against any potential impairment to independence. The Head of SIAS will manage the internal audit engagement of this service and report findings directly to the Strategic Director (CFO) in their capacity as S151 Officer.

10. Responsibility and Scope

- 10.1. The scope of SIAS encompasses, but is not limited to, the examination and evaluation of the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's governance, risk management, and internal control processes (as they relate to the organisation's priorities and objectives) and the promotion of appropriate ethics and values.
- 10.2. Internal control and risk management objectives considered by internal audit extend to the organisation's entire control and risk management environment and include:
 - consistency of operations or programs with established objectives and goals, and effective performance
 - effectiveness and efficiency of governance, operations, and employment of resources

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- compliance with significant policies, plans, procedures, laws, and regulations
 - design, reliability and integrity of management and financial information processes, including the means to identify, measure, classify, and report such information
 - safeguarding of assets
- 10.3. SIAS is well placed to provide advice and support on emerging risks and controls and will, if requested, deliver consulting and advisory services, or evaluate specific operations.
- 10.4. SIAS is responsible for reporting to the Audit Committee and senior management, significant risk exposures (including those to fraud addressed in conjunction with the SAFS), control and governance issues and other matters that emerge from an engagement.
- 10.5. Engagements are allocated to (an) internal auditor(s) with the appropriate skills, experience, and competence. The auditor is then responsible for carrying out the work in accordance with the SIAS Operating Procedures Manual, and must consider the relevant elements of internal control, the needs and expectations of clients, the extent of work required to meet the engagement's objectives, its cost effectiveness, and the probability of significant error or non-compliance.
11. Role in Anti-Fraud
- 11.1. The SIAS work programme, designed in consultation with Senior Management, the Audit Committee and seeks to provide assurance on how the council manages the fraud risks to which it is exposed.
- 11.2. SIAS must have sufficient knowledge to evaluate the risk of fraud and the way it is managed by the Council but are not expected to have the expertise of a person or team whose primary responsibility is detecting and investigating fraud.
- 11.3. SIAS will exercise due professional care by considering the probability of significant errors, fraud, or non-compliance when developing audit scopes and objectives.
- 11.4. SBC is a partner of both SIAS and SAFS and benefits from collaboration and intelligence sharing between the teams. This informs both horizon scanning as part of the internal audit planning process and individual audit engagements.
- 11.5. The Client Audit Manager should be notified of all suspected or detected fraud, corruption, or impropriety so that the impact upon control arrangements can be evaluated.
12. Internal Audit Plan
- 12.1. Following discussion with appropriate senior management, the Client Audit Manager will submit a risk-based plan to the Audit Committee for review and approval. This will occur at least annually. The plan sets out the engagements agreed by the Section 151 Officer and Senior Leadership Team and demonstrates the priorities of both SIAS (the need to produce an annual internal audit opinion) and those of the organisation. Also included will be any relevant declarations of interest.

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- 12.2. The plan will be accompanied by details of the risk assessment approach used and other assurance considered during the planning process. Also shown will be the timing of an engagement, its budget in days, details of any contingency for new or changed risks, time for planning and reporting and a contribution to the development of SIAS.
- 12.3. The plan will be subject to regular review in year and may be modified in response to changes in the organisation's business, risks, operations, programmes, systems, and controls. All significant changes to the approved internal audit plan will be communicated in the quarterly update reports.
13. Reporting and Monitoring
 - 13.1. A draft written Terms of Reference will be prepared and issued to appropriate personnel at the start of an engagement. It will cover the intended objectives, scope and reporting mechanism and will be agreed with the client. Changes to the terms of reference during the engagement may occur and will be agreed following consultation with the client.
 - 13.2. A report will be issued to management on completion of an engagement. It will include a reasoned opinion, details of the time and scope within which it was prepared, management's responses to specific risk prioritised findings and recommendations made and a timescale within which corrective action will be / has been taken. If recommended action is not to be taken, an explanation for this will also be included.
 - 13.3. SIAS will follow-up the implementation of agreed recommendations in line with the protocol at each client. As appropriate, the outcomes of this work will be reported to the audit committee and may be used to inform the risk-based planning of future audit work. Should follow-up activity identify any significant error or omission, this will be communicated by the Client Audit Manager to all relevant parties.
 - 13.4. In consultation with senior management, the Client Audit Manager will consider, on a risk-basis, any request made by external stakeholders for sight of an internal audit report.
 - 13.5. Quarterly update reports to the Audit Committee will detail the results of each engagement, including significant risk exposures and control issues. In addition, an annual report will be produced giving an opinion on the overall control, governance, and risk management environment (and any other issues judged relevant to the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement) with a summary of the work that supports the opinion. Hertfordshire County Council's Head of Assurance will also make a statement of conformance with PSIAS, using the results of the annual self-assessment and Quality Assurance and Improvement Plan (QAIP) required by the PSIAS. The statement will detail the nature and reasons for any impairments, qualifications, or restrictions in scope for which the Committee should seek reassurances from management. Any improvement plans arising will be included in the annual report.
14. Periodic Assessment
 - 14.1. PSIAS require Hertfordshire County Council's Head of Assurance and the SIAS Board to arrange for an independent review of the effectiveness of internal audit undertaken

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by a suitably knowledgeable, qualified, and competent individual or organisation. This should occur at least every five years.

- 14.2. Hertfordshire County Council's Head of Assurance will ensure that continuous efforts are made to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of SIAS. These will include the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme, client feedback, appraisals, and shared learning with the external audit partner as well as coaching, supervision, and documented review.
- 14.3. A single review will be carried out to provide assurance to all SIAS partners with the outcomes included in the partner's Annual Report.
15. Review of the Audit Charter
 - 15.1. The Client Audit Manager will review this charter annually and will present to the first audit committee meeting of each financial year, any changes for approval.
 - 15.2. The Client Audit Manager reviewed this Audit Charter in April 2024. It will next be reviewed in April 2025.

Glossary of Terms

<p>Audit Committee</p>	<p>The PSIAS defines the Audit Committee as “The governance group charged with independent assurance of the adequacy of the risk management framework, the internal control environment and the integrity of financial reporting.”</p> <p>The Audit Committee operates in accordance with its terms of reference contained in Stevenage Borough Council’s Constitution.</p> <p>CIPFA’s <i>Audit Committees Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police 2022 Edition</i> indicates that for a local authority, it is best practice for the audit committee to report directly to full council rather than to another committee, as the council itself most closely matches the body of ‘those charged with governance’. This is the case at SBC.</p>
<p>Audit Plan</p>	<p>The programme of risk-based work carried out by the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) on behalf of its clients.</p>
<p>Board</p>	<p>The PSIAS defines the ‘Board’ as “The highest-level governing body (e.g., a board of directors, a supervisory board, or a board of governors or trustees) charged with the responsibility to direct and/or oversee the organisation’s activities and hold senior management accountable. Although governance arrangements vary among jurisdictions and sectors, typically the board includes members who are not part of management. If a board does not exist, the word “board” in the Standards refers to a group or person charged with governance of the organisation. Furthermore, “board” in the Standards may refer to a committee or another body to which the governing body has delegated certain functions (e.g., an Audit Committee).</p> <p>For the purposes of the SIAS Audit Charter, the Board as referred to in the PSIAS shall be Stevenage Borough Council’s Audit Committee. All references to the Audit Committee in the SIAS Audit Charter should be read in this context.</p>
<p>Chief Audit Executive (CAE)</p>	<p>The PSIAS describes the role of CAE as “a person in a senior position responsible for effectively managing the internal audit activity in accordance with the internal audit charter and the mandatory elements of the International Professional Practices Framework. The CAE or others reporting to the CAE will have appropriate professional certifications and qualifications. The specific job title and/or</p>

APPENDIX D – AUDIT CHARTER 2024/2025

	<p>responsibilities of the CAE may vary across organisations.”</p> <p>The CAE is fundamental to the success of the service and to the extent to which it complies with the Standards. Regular reference is made to this role throughout the PSIAS, including some specific requirements relating to whoever is designated the role.</p> <p>For the purposes of the SIAS Audit Charter, the CAE as referred to in the PSIAS shall be SBC’s Client Audit Manager. All references to the Client Audit Manager in the SIAS Audit Charter should be read in this context.</p>
<p>Global Internal Audit Standards</p>	<p>The Standards guide the worldwide professional practice of internal auditing and serve as a basis for evaluating and elevating the quality of the internal audit function. At the heart of the Standards are 15 guiding principles that enable effective internal auditing. The standards have an implementation date of 9 January 2025, or a likely extended date of 1 April 2025 for the public sector.</p>
<p>Management</p>	<p>Operational officers of the Council responsible for creating corporate policy and organising, planning, controlling, and directing resources to achieve the objectives of that policy. Senior management is defined as the Head of Paid Service, Chief Officers, and their direct reports.</p>
<p>Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS)</p>	<p>These standards, which are based on the mandatory elements of the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF), are intended to promote further improvement in the professionalism, quality, consistency, and effectiveness of internal audit across the public sector. They reaffirm the importance of robust, independent, and objective internal audit arrangements to provide stakeholders with the key assurances they need to support them both in managing and overseeing the organisation and in producing the annual governance statement.</p>
<p>Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS)</p>	<p>SIAS is a local authority partnership comprising Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and seven Hertfordshire district and borough councils. SIAS also provides internal audit services to a limited number of external clients. HCC is the host authority for the partnership and provides support services such as HR, technology, and accommodation.</p>

APPENDIX D – AUDIT CHARTER 2024/2025

SIAS Board	The Board that comprises officer representatives from the partner authorities and is responsible for the governance of the SIAS partnership.
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Note:

For readability, the term 'internal audit activity' as used in the PSIAS guidance has been replaced with 'SIAS' in this Charter.

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Meeting: Audit Committee

Portfolio Area: All

Date: 4 June 2024

Agenda Item:

2023/24 Annual Governance Statement and Local Code of Corporate Governance

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. To advise Members of the Audit Committee on the content of the Council's Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 and approve the changes to the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That Members of the Audit Committee approve the changes to the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance (Appendix One).
- 2.2. That Members of the Audit Committee recommend the Council's 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement (Appendix Two), for approval by the Statement of Accounts Committee.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 CIPFA/SOLACE Framework and Guidance

- 3.1.1 In 2006, CIPFA/SOLACE produced a publication called Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework and Guidance. In April 2016, CIPFA/SOLACE published a reviewed Framework and Guidance that reflects the International Framework: 'Good Governance in the Public Sector'. The purpose of the Framework is to support each local authority in developing and shaping an informed approach to governance, aimed at achieving the highest standards of governance in a measured and proportionate way.

3.1.2 The 2016 CIPFA/SOLACE Framework identifies seven core principles:

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

B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

(Principles A and B are considered fundamental and applicable through principles C to G)

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

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

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

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

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

3.2 Local Code of Corporate Governance

3.2.1 The Local Code of Corporate Governance is a public statement of the ways in which the Council achieves good corporate governance. This is based on the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2016)' and focusses on the above mentioned seven core principles.

3.2.2 The arrangements set out in the Local Code of Corporate Governance and the Annual Governance Statement will allow the Council to move ahead with its corporate planning process confident that it can address the issues for governance and risk.

3.2.3 Within Stevenage Borough Council, Corporate Governance operates to:

- Establish and monitor the Council's vision and objectives
- Facilitate policy and decision making
- Ensure compliance with policies, procedures, laws and regulations
- Ensure the economic, efficient use of resources and secure continuous improvement
- Support delivery of high-quality services and effective performance management
- Identify and manage the Council's risks.

3.2.4 The Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance was last reported to this Committee on 7 June 2023. The code has been reviewed and is attached for

reference at Appendix A. The changes made as a result of this year's review are summarised in the table below.

Principle	Change
Principle A	Changed to reflect new RIPA Policy which was approved by Audit Committee in 2023/24.
Principle D	Changed to reflect the new Commercial and Insourcing Strategy 2023-2026 which outlines the Council's approach to operating more commercially.

3.4 Annual Governance Statement

3.4.1 The Annual Governance Statement, at Appendix Two, is a statutory document which explains the processes and procedures in place to enable the Council to carry out its functions effectively. The statement is produced annually following a review of the Council's governance arrangements and includes an action plan to address any significant governance issues identified.

3.4.5 The Council has an agreed local framework for compiling the Annual Governance Statement. Arrangements for governance in 2023/24 have been reviewed in accordance with this local framework, as outlined below:

- Review existing governance arrangements against the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework.
- Update the Council's Local Code of Governance in accordance with this review.
- Identify systems, processes and documentation that provide evidence of compliance.
- Identify the issues that have not been addressed adequately in the Council and consider how they should be addressed.
- Identify the individuals who will be responsible for undertaking the actions required and plan accordingly.
- Prepare the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement.
- Consideration of the Annual Governance Statement by senior management prior to consideration by Audit Committee. The Annual Governance Statement was considered at the Senior Leadership Team meeting on 14th May 2024.
- In year monitoring of the Council's status of corporate governance is carried out by Corporate Governance Group which is chaired by the Strategic Director (Chief Finance Officer).

3.4.6 Actions to enhance governance arrangements as a result of the above review were reported to Audit Committee at its meeting on 26th March 2024.

- 3.4.7 Actions identified which are recommended for inclusion in the Annual Governance Statement by the Shared Internal Audit Service or are considered important in the management of 'very high/high level' strategic risks, are set out in the Annual Governance Statement. By adopting this approach, any concerns over key controls that have a material effect on corporate governance arrangements and associated delivery of priority outcomes should be addressed.
- 3.4.8 The Annual Governance Statement actions for 2023/24 are outlined on pages 31-35 of the Annual Governance Statement.
- 3.4.9 Corporate Governance Group will monitor the delivery of governance actions, including the actions mentioned above and a six-month progress update will be reported to Audit Committee in November.
- 3.4.10 The signatories to the Annual Governance Statement (The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive) must be satisfied that the Council's governance arrangements continue to be fit for purpose and that significant actions identified to enhance governance arrangements are being addressed.

3.5 Corporate Backbone

- 3.5.1 The Council's corporate governance arrangements are evidenced by a number of policies, plans, processes and monitoring arrangements which are referred to as 'The Corporate Backbone' of the Council. The Corporate Backbone is attached as Appendix Three for reference.

3.6 2023/24 Audit Opinion

- 3.6.1 The Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) has assigned 'Substantial' assurance for the Council's financial systems for 2023/24 which means "there is a sound system of governance, risk management and control, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the areas audited." SIAS has assigned 'Reasonable' assurance for non-financial systems for 2023/24, meaning "there is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited."

3.7 Service Assurance Statements

- 3.7.1 All Assistant Directors complete a Service Assurance Statement each year. The Service Assurance Statement provides assurance that governance arrangements operated effectively during the year in respect of the business units for which the Assistant Director has responsibility.

4. **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS**

- 4.1 The Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance (Appendix One) has been updated to reflect changes to the Council's governance arrangements since its last

review in June 2023 and Audit Committee is required to agree the revised Local Code of Corporate Governance.

4.2 The Annual Governance Statement (Appendix Two) must be considered by the Audit Committee before accompanying the Statement of Accounts.

4.3 The Annual Governance Statement is intended to provide public assurance that the Council has sound governance arrangements, including a sound system of internal control, designed to help manage and control business risk. The document is an important public expression of the arrangements the Council applies to achieve good business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance.

5. **IMPLICATIONS**

5.6 **Financial Implications**

3.1.1. Robust scrutiny of the Council's Annual Governance Statement and Framework applied in line with best practice will further strengthen the Council's sound base of strong financial management and assist in reducing risk.

3.2. **Legal Implications**

3.2.1. It is a requirement of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 that the council publishes an Annual Governance Statement.

3.3. **Risk Implications**

3.3.1. A strong internal control environment contributes to the overall effective management of the Council and will minimise the risks of the Council failing to achieve its ambitions and priorities, and service improvements.

3.3.2. Without robust governance arrangements, there are potential service continuity and reputation risk implications.

3.4. **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

3.4.1. Officers responsible for the delivery of any improvement actions identified will also be responsible for completion of any relevant Equality Impact Assessments.

3.5. **Other Corporate Implications**

3.5.1. All aspects of the work of the Council are affected by its corporate governance arrangements, as well as the Council's partners in service delivery and other agencies with which the Council shares information. External bodies in particular, need to have confidence in the way the Council operates and this can be achieved by demonstrating robust governance arrangements that are fully embedded.

4. **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

- CIPFA/SOLACE, 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (2016 Framework and Guidance)
- CIPFA/IFAC International Framework 'Good Governance in the Public Sector (published August 2014)

- Stevenage Borough Council's Local Framework for compiling the AGS

5. APPENDICES

- Appendix One – Local Code of Corporate Governance (June 2024)
- Appendix Two – 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement
- Appendix Three – Corporate Backbone

**Stevenage Borough Council
Local Code of Corporate Governance**

Version:	Audit Committee June 2024
Status:	For Audit Committee June 2024
Last update to Guide	May 2024
Next review of Guide due:	May 2025

Stevenage Borough Council Local Code of Corporate Governance

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.



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 and Assistant 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
- Register of Interests
- Register of Gifts and Hospitality
- Whistle-Blowing Policy
- Contract Standing Orders
- Financial Regulations
- Co-Operative Procurement Policy
- Anti-Bribery Policy
- Fraud Sanctions Policy
- Anti-Money Laundering 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.

Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA)

The Council has a RIPA Policy which ensures the requirements of the above Act are followed for any direct covert surveillance which is carried out and any such activity is reported quarterly to Corporate Governance Group and is reflected in the Annual Governance Statement. All authorising officers are trained in accordance with the Act. The

Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Partnership Arrangements

The council has the following key Partnerships:

- Stevenage Together

- Everyone Active
- Stevenage Development Board

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 has a Community Engagement Framework which provides a clear overview of ways in which the Council engages with communities across Stevenage.

Stevenage Chronicle, which is the Council's quarterly magazine for residents, provides the latest information about Council initiatives and services, community news and events.

The council uses a variety of response methods, including its website, social media and traditional methods such as surveys and focus groups to communicate with its residents and stakeholders.

A Residents' Survey is carried out every three 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 briefings to brief and involve staff in the decisions that affect the future direction of the council.

The Council's intranet also provides staff with updates, news, blogs and information.

Co-Operative Inclusive Economy Charter

The Council has a co-operative Inclusive Economy Charter to encourage residents and businesses to work together to help protect Stevenage's economy and support the Council's approach to Community Wealth Building.

Social Value Portal

The Council uses a social value portal to monitor, measure and manage the tendering and delivery of social value through contracts and other business-related activities. The aim of this is to understand what value business brings to society, according to the principles of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012. The Social Value Portal uses the National Social Value Measurement Framework, also known as the National TOMs (Themes, Outcomes Measures), to measure social value. The National TOMs framework was developed by the National Social Value Taskforce and was the result of extensive consultation across its members and is endorsed by the Local Government Association.

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. Executive, Council and Overview and Scrutiny meetings continue to be recorded and are available via You Tube which means that members and the public can view meetings at a time convenient to them.

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.

Statement of Community Involvement

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires all local authorities to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The Council's SCI sets out a framework to ensure that comprehensive and effective public engagement takes place throughout all stages of the planning process.

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
- Anti-Fraud.
- Building Control
- Legal
- Hertfordshire Home Improvement Agency
- Procurement
- Payroll

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

Research and benchmarking

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.

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 guided the Council in terms of its future strategic focus and resource allocation during 2023/24. The FTFC programme consisted of five programmes that aimed to deliver improved outcomes and real change for Stevenage residents.

Corporate Plan:

The council's Corporate Plan: Future Town, Future Council set out the Council's vision and the outcomes and objectives the council wanted to achieve over the Plan's lifespan. The Plan incorporated the council's FTFC ambitions, projects and the change programme. It guided the

strategic policy framework for the council, ensuring that services consider the council's key priorities in service planning and resource allocation.

Equality Impact Assessments

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.

EDI Policy

The council has an agreed set of objectives to promote equality, diversity and inclusion across its services, communities and workforce over the next 4 years (2022 –2026) and in-line with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) of the Equality Act (2010).

Alongside the objectives the council has an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy (2022-2026) which sets out its approach to advancing equality, diversity and inclusion, including a commitment to the development and publication of an EDI Action Plan. The delivery and monitoring of EDI activity is the responsibility of the Equality and Diversity Governance Group (EDGG), the newly established Officer Equality Group (OEG) and recently introduced Senior Leadership Team Equality Champion.

Local Plan

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

Local Development Scheme

An updated Local Development Scheme was agreed by Executive in April 2019. The Scheme sets out milestones for the examination of the Local Plan and its adoption. It also sets out timeframes for the adoption of the Community Infrastructure Levy and a new Area Action Plan relating to the Railway Station area.

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

Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is the Council's key General Fund financial planning document and sets out the Council's strategic approach to the management of the General Fund including council tax levels, capital funding and treasury management. This strategy underpins the Council's key priorities for Stevenage as set out in the FTFC agenda and other strategic documents of the Council. The key aim of the Strategy is to facilitate the Council in achieving the outcomes set out in those documents, by setting out MTFS principles, which generates the need for Financial Security targets, identifies financial pressures and any additional resources for priorities to ensure the Council has a financially sustainable plan.

Assets and Capital Group

The Officer's Assets and Capital Group ensures effective arrangements are in place for the design and delivery of capital projects and resources.

Financial Management

Financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement. 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.

Housing Revenue Account Business Plan

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan is the council's 30-year strategic plan for managing and maintaining its housing stock. It sets out the council's short-to-medium term plans and priorities for its housing management services and provides a long-term perspective on stock investment and financial plan. The Council's HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy looks at these plans over a five-year horizon in greater detail setting out the principles which generates the need for Financial Security targets. Monthly meetings focus on the monitoring and delivery of the HRA Business Plan.

The HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy underpins the Council's key housing priorities for Stevenage. The Council continues to work co-operatively with housing customers to help shape these priorities and associated programmes.

Council's Financial Security Group

The Council's Financial Security Group reviews the MTFs, savings and growth options prior to approval by the Executive and Council.

Capital Programme and Strategy

The Council has a Capital Strategy. The purpose of the Capital Strategy is to show how the Council determines its priorities for capital investment, how much it can afford to borrow and sets out any associated risks. All capital schemes are regularly reviewed 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.

Housing Asset Management Strategy

The Council also has a Housing Asset Management Strategy and action plan for implementation of the strategy over the next five years. The Strategy sets out the underlying principles which sit behind excellent asset management and the key strategic projects and programmes to ensure the council derives maximum value for its assets whilst providing high quality homes for its tenants. The Strategy will allow the Council to meet its strategic goals of having fit for purpose, safe, well maintained and well-presented housing stock, with a view to optimising housing development opportunities where appropriate.

General Fund Asset Management Strategy

The General Fund Asset Management Strategy and rolling five-year action plan guides the Council's future strategic property decisions to make sure the estate is managed sustainably and efficiently so it can adapt and remain fit for the future, and help the Council meet its FTFC aims. The Strategy sets out clear financial targets to achieve during the next five years to meet the council's financial challenges. To help reach these financial targets, the Strategy recommends seven clear areas for change, including undertaking local asset reviews to identify new opportunities to release surplus land and buildings for sale and opportunities to generate new sustained revenue income as well as improving efficiency and utilisation of assets with partners. T

Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy

The Council's Commercial and Insourcing Strategy 2023-2026 outlines the Council's approach to operating more commercially. This will be achieved through maximising opportunities to insource services, the delivery of business process improvements and the generation of new or enhanced sources of revenue. The Commercialisation and Investment Executive Committee provides strategic direction to enable, oversee and support the development of co-operative commercial and insourcing programmes of work.

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 regular budget monitoring reports and meet regularly with their Finance Business Partners.

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.

Service Planning

All the Council's key services have an annual Service Plan which set out the objectives of the service for the forthcoming year. The plan contains information about the service's performance targets and corporate priorities programme and milestones. It also sets out the risks, staff development activities, equality, budgetary and workforce considerations that will inform and influence service delivery throughout the year.

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

Developing Member and Officer Capacity and Capability

The Council uses a Human Resources Management system to support workforce planning, training, development and the implementation of the Council's competency framework structure. The Council's Competency Framework provides a map of behaviours, as well as the skills, that are valued and recognised by the Council.

The council has a number of measures and work streams in place to ensure member and officer capacity and capability. These include:

- A workforce planning process
- A HR Business Partnering service which supports the development and implementation of workforce plans
- A member development programme and a member induction programme
- Corporate Learning and Development Programmes
- A dynamic real time Appraisal Policy and Procedure (Real Conversations)
- An Apprenticeship programme
- E-learning for new and existing staff
- Induction training via e-learning and targeted induction training.

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 a Risk Management Policy and Guide as well as 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's 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.

Corporate Governance Group

A Corporate Governance Group meets four times a year to consider the governance framework from the perspective of the seven core principles of corporate governance. Corporate Governance Group reviews the Council's compliance with the behaviours that make up the seven core principles of corporate governance and monitors any actions identified in order to maintain compliance.

Service Assurance

At business unit level, assurance of compliance with the principles of good governance requires all Assistant Directors to complete, certify and return a Service Assurance Statement each year. Progress against service governance actions identified as a result of this review are monitored and reported back to Audit Committee.

Performance monitoring

Strategic insight data is captured through the monitoring of two programmes. The Future Town, Future Council and the suite of corporate performance measures were 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.

Data Quality

The council has a Data Quality Policy which outlines the council's commitment to ensuring data quality and arrangements are in place to monitor the data quality of performance data. Each performance measure has a data quality checklist to ensure the integrity of the data being reported.

Data Sharing

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 a robust and resilient fraud prevention, detection, and investigation service in relation to non-benefit and corporate fraud. The service updates Audit Committee every quarter on the work it has carried out.

The council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption and Whistle-Blowing Policies as well as an Anti-Bribery, Anti-Money Laundering and a Fraud Sanctions policies are all available on the council's intranet.

Information and Records Governance

Overall responsibility for information management at the Council has been assigned to the Council's Records Governance Manager, who is also the Council's Data Protection Officer. The Council has a Corporate Information Governance Group, which oversees the Council's information governance arrangements.

The Council has identified and documented its information assets and data flows and developed an information asset register. The Council has an Information Management Policy and a Security Incident Management Policy which define the Council's procedures with regards to information governance and the management of data security incidents. Document retention guidance has been produced which includes a defined and enforced corporate records retention schedule in line with the requirement of the GDPR and good practice. There are also defined procedures in place for the disposal and destruction of information.

The Council has a Senior Information Risk Officer who is a senior officer with individual responsibility for managing departmental information risks.

Data protection breaches are reported quarterly to Corporate Governance Group.

Health and Safety

To ensure and maintain corporate wide oversight and clarity on health and safety compliance and performance across the Council, a corporate health and safety governance structure is in place that provides assurance to senior management that health and safety assessments and activity across the Council are being effectively managed. Embedding of the Health and Safety framework is being achieved by a process of internal and external audits, peer reviews, shadow health and

safety inspections, risk assessment reviews, training to upskill managers, health and safety group meetings, hazard monitoring and action plans.

Business Continuity

The Council has business continuity plans for all of its key services and a Corporate Business Continuity Plan is in place to manage the corporate response to an incident.

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 where possible 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 Performance and Improvement Team and areas of concern are escalated to Corporate Governance Group/Corporate Risk 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.

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Stevenage Borough Council's Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

What is Corporate Governance?

Corporate governance is both the policies and procedures in place and the values and behaviours that are needed to help ensure the organisation runs effectively, can be held to account for its actions and delivers the best possible outcomes for the community with the resources available. Good governance enables the Council to effectively achieve its intended outcomes, whilst always acting in the public interest.

Achieving the intended outcomes whilst acting in the public interest



Figure 1: International Framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector (CIPFA/IFAC, 2014) 'Achieving the Intended Outcomes While Acting in the Public Interest at all Times' – The International Framework

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 developing and shaping an informed approach to governance, aimed at achieving the highest standards of governance in a measured and proportionate way.

(* CIPFA – Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, SOLACE – Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers, IFAC – international Federation of Accountants)

The Framework is designed to assist authorities with the review of the unique local governance arrangements in place 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 to achieve desired outcomes for service users and communities.

The Council's responsibility in relation to Corporate Governance

Identifying Local Governance Arrangements

Stevenage Borough Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and to proper standards and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and 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, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, Stevenage Borough Council is also responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, which include arrangements for the management of risk.

Stevenage Borough Council has adopted a Local Code of Corporate Governance that sets out a commitment to corporate governance and summarises the governance arrangements in place to enable the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives, to consider whether those objectives have enhanced delivery of appropriate cost-effective services and outlines the activities through which it accounts to and engages with its communities. The Local Code reflects the core and sub-principles outlined in the 2016 CIPFA/SOLACE Framework, 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government'

The Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance is reviewed and approved by Audit Committee each year. It was last approved by Audit Committee at its meeting on 6th June 2023 and has been reviewed and the revised Local Code is being presented to Audit Committee at its meeting in June 2024 for approval.

This Annual Governance Statement explains how the Council has continued to comply with the Local Code, summarises the review of its governance arrangements and identifies areas of governance to be strengthened and outlines actions to strengthen any areas identified. The Statement also meets the statutory requirements in section 6 of the 2015 Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations, which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an Annual Governance Statement.

How do we know our arrangements are working?

The Local Governance Framework – How the Council monitors arrangements in place

The local Governance Framework outlines the process the Council applies to review corporate governance arrangements. The system of internal control is a significant part of the framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. 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, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they materialise, and to manage them efficiently, effectively, and economically.

Stevenage Borough Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of local governance arrangements including the system of internal control.

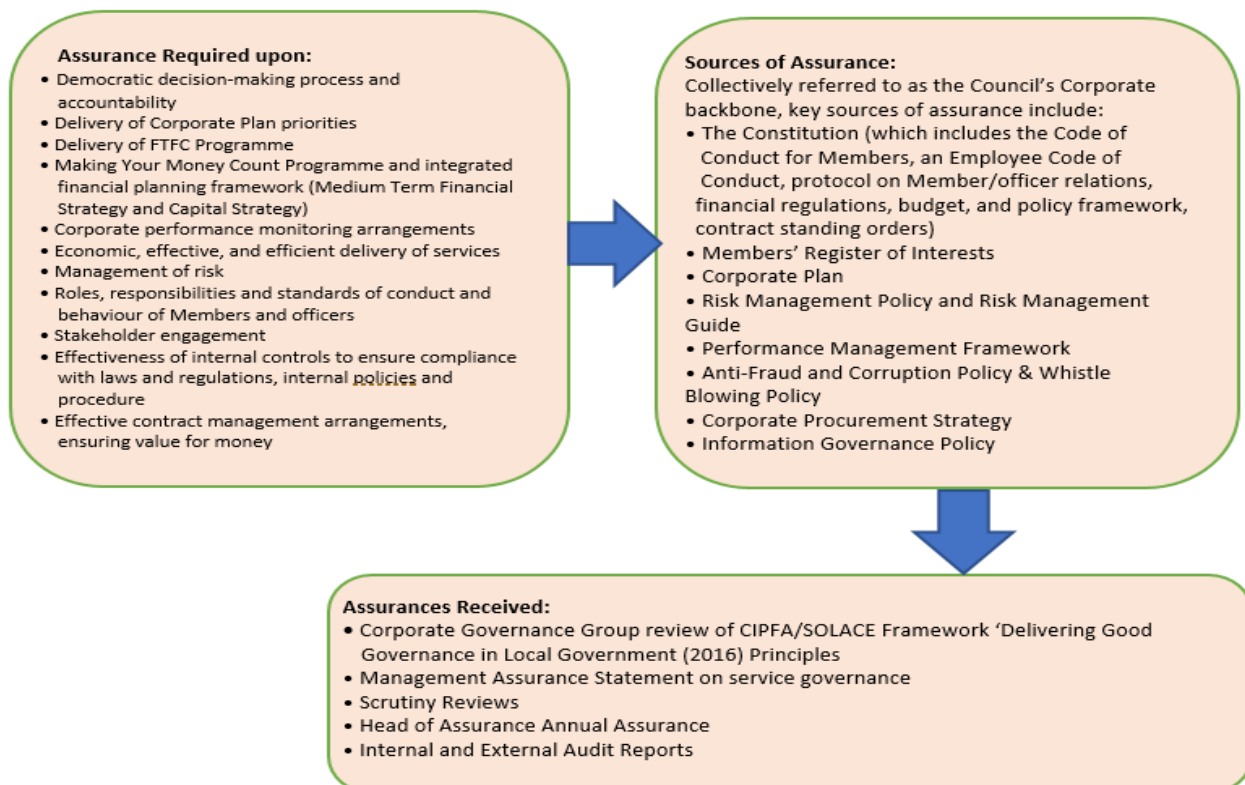
Governance monitoring and assurance arrangements

The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the senior managers within the Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Head of Assurance's Annual Report, and by comments made by external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

To monitor and maintain the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements and drive continuous improvement:

- A Corporate Governance Group meets four times a year to consider governance arrangements from the perspective of the seven core principles of corporate governance in the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework - the seven core principles are set out in the diagram on pages one and five.
- In addition to this proactive in-year review, an annual review of compliance with the behaviours that make up the seven core principles of corporate governance in the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework is carried out.
- At business unit level, assurance of compliance with the principles of good governance requires all Assistant Directors to complete, certify and return a Service Assurance Statement each year.
- Corporate Governance Group also consider whether any recommendations as a result of external or internal audit activity (and other review agencies and inspectorates), and the Head of Assurance Annual Report, require inclusion in the Statement.

All these mechanisms of review contribute to overall assurance for the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement. A summary of the types of assurance required, sources of assurance, assurance received is represented below.



The preparation and publication of the Annual Governance Statement in accordance with the requirements set out in the 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' Framework (2016)

fulfils the statutory requirement for the annual review of the effectiveness of systems of internal control meeting the requirement for 'preparation in accordance with proper practice'.

The Governance Framework summarised in this Statement has been in place at the Council for the year ended 31 March 2024 and up to the date of approval of the Statement of Accounts.

Assurance: Internal Audit Arrangements

Annual Audit Coverage

Delivery of the Council's Internal Audit is carried out by the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) hosted by Hertfordshire County Council and managed by the Client Audit Manager. Annual audit coverage is determined through a risk assessment, which is influenced by external regulatory requirements and the strategic and operational risks of the Council. By reviewing the Council's systems of internal control, risk management and governance in accordance with an approved Audit Plan, Internal Audit contribute to the Council's corporate governance framework.

The SIAS operates to defined professional standards, i.e. the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and the Client Audit Manager reports to the Council's Strategic Director (Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 Officer) providing updates on internal audit progress and issues at regular liaison meetings. The Client Audit Manager provides an independent opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the system of internal control, and this is reported annually to Audit Committee. The main responsibility of SIAS is to provide assurance and advice on the internal control systems of the Council to both Management and Members. The SIAS reviews and appraises the adequacy, reliability, and effectiveness of internal control within systems and recommends improvement where necessary. It also supports management in developing systems by providing advice on matters pertaining to risk and control.

2023/24 Audit Report

The Client Audit Manager's Annual Internal Audit Report and Assurance Statement is being reported to the Audit Committee in June 2024. From the internal audit work undertaken in 2023/24, SIAS can provide the following assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's control environment, broken down between financial and non-financial systems as follows:

**ASSURANCE
OPINION:
FINANCIAL
SYSTEMS**

Our overall opinion is Substantial Assurance; meaning there is a sound system of governance, risk management and control exist, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

**ASSURANCE
OPINION:
NON-FINANCIAL
SYSTEMS**

Our overall opinion is Reasonable Assurance; meaning there is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

Review of Effectiveness of Systems of Internal Audit

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 came into force from 1 April 2015; Paragraph 5 (1) states, “A relevant authority must undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance”.

As part of demonstrating the efficiency and effectiveness of the internal audit activity and identifying opportunities for improvement, the Head of SIAS must develop and maintain a quality assurance and improvement programme that covers all aspects of the internal audit activity. This includes an annual self-assessment undertaken by the Head of SIAS against the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) for Internal Audit in Local Government in the UK. The self-assessment concluded that the system of Internal Audit employed at Stevenage Borough Council is effective.

In addition, PSIAS require that an external assessment or peer review is undertaken at least once every five years. An independent peer review was undertaken in 2021/22, which concluded that SIAS ‘partially conforms’ to the PSIAS, including the Definition of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics and Standards. Key recommendations made in the peer review were addressed in year, permitting SIAS to ‘generally conform’ to the Standards. ‘Generally conforms’ is the highest opinion within the scale of three ratings, and the peer review also identified areas of good practice and high standards.

The annual performance indicators for SIAS are set by the SIAS Board which is comprised of the Chief Finance Officers from the client authorities within the partnership. The table below sets out SIAS performance against the performance indicator relating to planned days delivery and planned projects delivery.

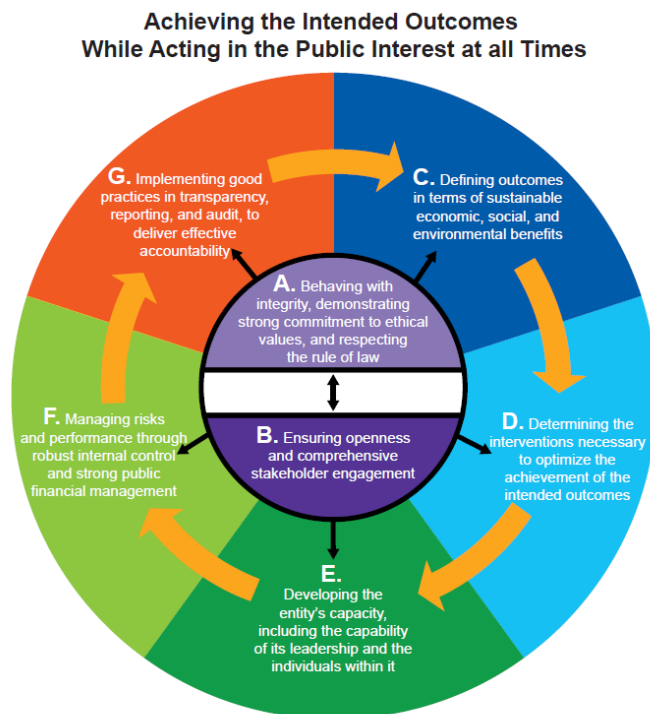
Indicator	Target 2023/24	Actual to 31 March 2024	Notes
1. Planned Days – percentage of actual billable days against planned chargeable days completed (excludes unused contingency)	95%	95%	262 days delivered out of the 275 days planned
2. Planned Projects – percentage of actual completed projects to draft report stage against planned completed projects by 31 st March 2024	90%	96%	26 projects to draft or final report from the 27 planned

The assurance arrangements conformed with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit (2010), as demonstrated through the assessment in the SIAS Annual Assurance Statement and Internal Audit Annual Report being reported to Audit Committee in June 2024.

The CIPFA/SOLACE Core Principles of Governance

The Council achieves good standards of governance by applying the CIPFA/SOLACE Principles of Governance set out in the ‘Delivering Good Governance in Local Government’ Framework (2016) represented in the International Framework.

The diagram below illustrates how the various principles for good governance in the public sector relate to each other. To achieve good governance the Council should achieve their intended outcomes while always acting in the public interest.



As overarching requirements for acting in the public interest, Principles A and B apply across all other principles (C – G)

A summary of the review of effectiveness of local arrangements in place for 2023/24 against each of the principles is set out on the following pages identifying opportunities for governance enhancements.

Progress against the delivery of actions identified in the 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement is reflected in the coloured boxes throughout this Annual Governance Statement

Principle A: Behaving with integrity and respecting the rule of law

Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law is acknowledged as key to the delivery of good governance and underpins the delivery of Council priorities and services for the community.

Summary of 2023/24 Review of Effectiveness:

The Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance identifies the Nolan Principles (Standards in Public Life) as underpinning all local government activity.

The standards of conduct and personal behaviour expected of Members and Officers, its partners and the community are defined and communicated through Codes of Conduct and Protocols and the Council's Constitution. Arrangements are in place to ensure that Members and Officers are aware of their responsibilities under these codes and protocols.

The Council's website outlines the arrangements for making a complaint that a member of the authority has failed to comply with the Authority's Code of Conduct and sets out how the authority will deal with such allegations. 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. The Council has appointed an Independent Person, to consult on alleged breaches to the Member Code of Conduct.

The Council has a Standards Committee to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members of the Council and deal with any allegations that a member is in breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and to consider changes to the Code as required.

The Council's Constitution sets out the employment procedures for the Head of the Paid Service, Strategic and Assistant Directors, Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer.

Organisational Values

The Council's six organisational Values shown here are underpinned by a behaviour framework for staff. The values are intended to influence the ways in which elected Members and officers think and behave in responding to future challenges.



The Values are embedded into Member and Officer Induction, regular officer meetings with their managers (REAL conversations), the Modern Member training programme, and management development programmes. A set of desired behaviours associated with each of the Values has been developed and form part of the Council's appraisal process for officers.

The Council has a Whistle-blowing Policy which is based on the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 as well as an Anti-Fraud and Corruption, Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Bribery and Fraud Sanctions policies. The Council's website and intranet have options for the public and staff to report suspected fraud that link to the Council's Shared Anti-Fraud Service webpage.

The following governance activity pertaining to best practice has been delivered in 2023/24:

- New Independent person appointed to Audit Committee in September 2023
- Updated Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Act) (RIPA) Policy was approved by Audit Committee in November 2023. RIPA regulates the use of certain surveillance powers by public authorities

Arrangements reflect those summarised in the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance – No significant requirements to enhance governance have been identified.

Principle B: Engaging with local people and other stakeholders

Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement is considered essential in meeting the Council's corporate ambitions and framework of values and regarded as key to effective service delivery. Communication supports the decision-making process and helps to improve service quality and foster good relationships between staff, Members, and stakeholders.

Summary of 2023/24 Review of Effectiveness:

Stevenage Borough Council is a co-operative council which means working in equal partnership with local people to shape and strengthen communities.

The Council wants to hear views about Council services. The Council regularly provides local residents, partners, and other interested parties with opportunities to influence the planning, prioritisation, and monitoring of services. A variety of methods are used to engage the local community, such as: surveys and questionnaires, community roadshows, focus and action groups and stakeholder conferences.

Cooperative Neighbourhoods

Through the development of the Cooperative Neighbourhoods programme in 2020, Stevenage Borough Council has formed partnerships between elected members, council officers, stakeholders, and community groups to focus on the needs of the community. Six cooperative neighbourhood areas each have a dedicated team that concentrates specifically on the development and

improvement of their area through community engagement and direct delivery. They are made up as follows:

- Bedwell and Almond Hill
- Chells and Manor
- Longmeadow & Roebuck
- Old Town, Symonds Green and Woodfield
- Shephall and Bandle Hill & The Poplars
- St Nicholas and Martins Wood

Each team functions in the following ways:

- Connecting staff from different departments who work in the same part of Stevenage so they can provide better services to residents.
- Responding more quickly to matters that residents are concerned about.
- Making it easier for residents to shape the services and projects in their neighbourhood by continuous engagement using a variety of opportunities including face to face, digital and email/telephone options.
- Supporting the activities of residents and communities who want to improve their neighbourhoods and create new opportunities for themselves

These teams also work together on the co-production of a variety of projects, initiatives, and developments across the town. Focusing on community collaboration and engagement, community wealth building and supporting local community groups and organisations, the Cooperative Neighbourhoods programme ensures healthy community relationships across the town.

In 2024/25 we will be providing a series of improvement elements for all of our neighbourhood centres plus additional resources for the following areas:

- Popple Way Shops (Pin Green/Almond Hill)
- Bedwell Shops (Bedwell)
- The Hyde (Shephall)
- Marymead Shops (Roebuck)
- Oak's Cross Shops (Longmeadow)

Shared Services

The Council has a number of shared service arrangements to provide efficient and effective shared service provision and governance arrangements facilitate effective stakeholder engagement to deliver agreed outcomes.

Customer Feedback

The Council has a system for recording customer feedback which enables learning from feedback and complaints to facilitate effective monitoring of information provided by customers to review future service delivery.

A Resident Survey was carried out in 2021/22 to survey how residents perceive Council services and their local area. The information gathered from residents has provided insight on residents' priorities for the town, the extent to which the Council is perceived to provide value for money and how well services are meeting residents' expectations. A STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) was also carried out. The STAR survey is used nationally by many housing providers to understand the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of council tenants and for them to tell their landlords what is important to them.

The Council is now required by the Regulator of Social Housing to conduct annual Tenant Satisfaction Measure surveys, which capture management data and tenant perception across a range of services. The Regulator will publish league tables and the Council will be expected to demonstrate what they are doing to increase satisfaction with the services being delivered. TSM's for 2023/24 are being analysed to inform priority areas of improvement for 2024/25.

The Council will need to ensure that its policies and procedures for dealing with complaints complies with the new Complaint Handling Code which was launched in February 2024. Local Councils are encouraged to adopt the Code as soon as they are able to do so. The Local Government Ombudsman intend to start considering the Code as part of its processes from April 2026 at the earliest.

The Code sets out a process for organisations that will allow them to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. The purpose of the Code is to enable organisations to resolve complaints raised by individuals promptly, and to use the data and learning from complaints to drive service improvements. It will also help to create a positive complaint handling culture amongst staff and individuals. The Code will act as a guide for individuals setting out what they may expect from an organisation when they make a complaint. Organisations should seek feedback from individuals in relation to their complaint handling as part of the drive to encourage a positive complaint and learning culture. Organisations should have a single policy for dealing with complaints covered by the Code.

The principles, process and timescales in this Code are aligned with the Complaint Handling Code issued by the Housing Ombudsman. This means that organisations who fall under the jurisdiction of both Ombudsmen should be able to provide a co-ordinated complaint handling process across services covered by both Codes.

Communication

The Council uses a variety of media to communicate with its residents, businesses, and customers, for example Stevenage Chronicle which is the Council's quarterly magazine for residents which provides the latest information about Council initiatives and services, community news and events. The Council's website, press releases and social media are also used extensively to provide information to the public.



Peer Review

The Council is keen to demonstrate all the great work it is doing to deliver better outcomes for the community, and a Corporate Peer Challenge would provide an opportunity to do this. Following the implementation of a number of key strategic changes in 2024 such as the new Corporate Plan – Making Stevenage Even Better (2024-27), fulfilment of all-out elections, fruition of a number of joint-partnership 'Towns Fund' activities with the Stevenage Development Board, the Council is planning a peer review in 2025.

The following governance activity pertaining to best practice has been delivered in 2023/24:

- The Annual Report and Performance Overview 2022/23 highlighting the Council's achievements over the past year and plans for the next twelve months was approved by Executive and published on the Council's website in July 2023
- From 23 October to 4 December 2023 the Council consulted on the focus of the five strategic priorities and three cross-cutting themes within the revised Corporate Plan – Making Stevenage Even Better. The purpose was to understand if the areas of focus were representative of key issues in Stevenage, if the strategic priorities were correct, if the cross-cutting themes had the right focus, or if there was something else that needed to be included.
- We also consulted on the introduction of a Stevenage Cycle Share Scheme and public consultation was held in relation to proposed changes to the Oval which generated over 7000 responses in total.

- In July 2023, the Executive agreed the 15 proposed actions in the Stevenage Borough Council Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (2023-2024) as well as the recommendations of the Stevenage Equalities Commission (SEC) and the SEC Legacy Group Action Plan.

Equality and Diversity

The Council views equality and diversity to be about knowing and understanding the make-up of the town and the needs of its communities. The Council delivers services that are fair, accessible, and open to everyone. The Council communicates to staff, customers, communities, and our partners about the importance of treating people fairly and celebrating differences.

In 2022, the Council agreed the objectives that will promote equality, diversity and inclusion across its services, communities, and workforce over the next four years (2022 –2026) and in-line with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) of the Equality Act (2010).

The council is working, together with its partners, to:

- Understand the diverse needs of our communities and how to meet them effectively
- Actively engage, encourage, and support local people, groups and organisations to participate in local democracy to improve opportunity and inclusion
- Promote equality, diversity and inclusion through our strategic partnerships, service delivery and supply chain(s)
- Use local data to shape services so that the needs of our diverse population are met
- Aim to improve the diversity of our organisation at all levels so that our communities are represented
- Ensure staff have the values, skills and knowledge to maintain a positive and inclusive workplace culture that values all employees equally

Alongside these objectives, in 2022 the council also made a commitment in its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy (2022-2026) to deliver an annual EDI Action Plan 2023/24. These actions were agreed in July 2023 and covered a range of services which clearly set out how the Council will work with staff, partners, businesses, and residents to advance equality, diversity and inclusion across the community. A report setting out progress against the actions will be presented to the Executive in September 2024, and this will be accompanied by a new and revised EDI Action Plan for 2024/25. A key component to monitoring delivery of EDI activities is the active participation of staff, and the monthly meetings of the Officer Equality Group to share progress and identify new opportunities to build upon existing partnership working and deliver a meaningful equality programme. This is overseen by the member lead Equality and Diversity Governance Group (EDGG) and the Senior Leadership Team Equality Champion.

Building on the success of the EDI Action Plan, in 2024/25 the council introduced the cross-cutting theme of **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion** as part of its new Corporate Plan – Making Stevenage Even Better (2024-27). The EDI Cross-cutting theme demonstrates the council's commitment to making a difference across the workforce and community to advance EDI.

Arrangements reflect those summarised in the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance – No significant requirements to enhance governance have been identified

Principle C: Defining outcomes – the Council’s vision and priorities

Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable, economic, social and environmental benefits. The focus of the Council’s governance arrangements is to deliver the best possible outcomes for the community and the Council’s vision for the town. It is essential that the Council seeks customer feedback and works with partners, to pool resources and skills

Summary of 2023/24 Review of Effectiveness:

The Council’s vision:

Stevenage: a prosperous town with vibrant communities and improved life chances

Stevenage Together:

Stevenage Together is a range of diverse partner agencies who share a vision of Stevenage in the future. Its ethos is to foster innovative ways of working together, in order to improve the lives of people who live work and visit Stevenage.

Stevenage Together aims to:

- Generate pride in the borough
- Develop communities
- Help people feel safe
- Regenerate the economy
- Improve residents’ health

The work of Stevenage Together includes:

Improving the health of Stevenage residents by:

- Providing a healthy hub;
- Providing clean and green spaces and play opportunities; and
- Promoting good mental health.

Maximising opportunities to grow the local economy by:

- Encouraging volunteering.
- Developing opportunities for our young people;
- Supporting local businesses to grow; and
- Addressing child poverty.

Making Stevenage a safer place to live, work and visit by:

- Developing proactive solutions to antisocial behaviour;
- Consulting with communities to understand their concerns and needs; and
- Designing out crime.



Stevenage Development Board

The Stevenage Development Board was set up in 2020 to prepare Stevenage's bid for government funding through the MyTown initiative. The Board brings together voluntary key stakeholders from public sector organisations, private businesses, not for profit organisations and Heritage organisations to ensure a diverse range of views are represented. The work of the Development Board forms part of the wider 20 year £1bn regeneration of Stevenage Town Centre. The Board provides an environment for collaboration and innovation across a range of partners, especially in the skills sector, providing a strong platform to support the regeneration efforts in the town. As a result of the joint working of the Board, Stevenage secured the second joint highest bid in the country.

Future Town, Future Council

The Future Town, Future Council (FTFC) programme was the Council's main strategic planning approach to create a better Stevenage and great service for its people through 2023/24 and for the previous five years. The FTFC programme guided the Council's focus and resource allocation as defined in the FTFC Corporate Plan.

The FTFC Corporate Plan consisted of five priorities:

- Transforming our Town
- Making Your Money Count
- Co-Operative Neighbourhoods
- A Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town
- More Social and Affordable Homes



Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan

The Council has recently agreed a new three-year Corporate Plan, **Making Stevenage Even Better**. This new Corporate Plan, which will be effective from April 2024, sets out the Council's priorities, focus outcomes and actions for the next three years. It builds upon the long-term objectives of the above-mentioned Future Town Future Council Corporate Plan and reflects the need to prioritise effective delivery of services, whilst delivering on what residents have said matters to them.

In response to resident feedback and changing local demographics, five key strategic priorities were identified, all of equal importance, which the Council would like to see achieved over the next three years:

- **Transforming Our town**
- **More Social, Affordable and Good Quality Homes**
- **Thriving Neighbourhood**
- **Tackling Climate Change**
- **Balancing the Budget**

In addition to the above mentioned five strategic priorities, there are three areas of work which cut across delivery of all strategic priorities, these are **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Health and Wellbeing; Technology and Innovation**.



The inclusion of cross cutting themes represents the need to raise awareness of these areas when designing and delivering services. They have important social benefits and demonstrate the importance the Stevenage Borough Council places on effective partnership working and its existing commitment to tackle health inequalities, champion equality, encourage inclusivity and embrace diversity. They ensure that consideration of innovative solutions to empower residents is a key consideration in the Council's decision-making processes. By maintaining focus on these three themes, the Council can ensure a comprehensive rounded approach to delivering outcomes for the benefit of the community.

For each of the five strategic priorities and three cross-cutting themes, there are outcomes and actions, these will be reviewed annually to make sure that the Council is on track to deliver what it said it would.

Annual Report

Every year progress against the Council's priorities are considered and this informs important decisions about where to spend the budget. The Annual Report summarises the Council's achievements over the past year and outlines what it plans to do in the next twelve months and is published on the Council's website.

Financial and Asset Planning

The budget setting process should be considered against the backdrop of Government grant cuts which total £5.3Million since 2010. These cuts have required the Council to find cumulative savings of £11Million when inflationary costs are also taken into consideration. COVID affected the Council's finances during 2020/21-2021/22 (an estimated £4Million cost) as has the cost-of-living crisis due to higher inflation (estimated £1.4Million impact during 2023/24).

A number of local government journal and national press articles have recently highlighted concerns concerning the local government funding model. The Government has commenced an inquiry on financial distress in local authorities. This follows a number of Councils issuing a section 114 notice because they can no longer set a balanced budget for the year. The Local Government Association (LGA), District Council Network (DCN) and the County Council's Network (CCN) amongst other organisations have all warned that more Section 114 notices are likely unless the local government funding model is revised to reflect the pressures councils are facing across a range of services.

Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is the Council's key General Fund financial planning document and sets out the Council's strategic approach to the management of the General Fund including Council tax levels, capital funding and treasury management. This strategy underpins the Council's key priorities for Stevenage. The key aim of the Strategy is to facilitate the Council in achieving the outcomes by setting out MTFS principles, which generates the need for financial security targets, identifies financial pressures and any additional resources for priorities to ensure the Council has a financially sustainable plan.

Due to the significant level of savings required in recent years, this Council, along with many others has adopted a one-year budget setting process rather than taking a three-year view. Whilst the Council does not currently have a three-year budget, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy identifies the projected funding needs over a longer period and is reviewed annually.

The Council has taken significant steps over recent years to balance its budget and the current projections show that the on-going balanced budget will be achieved to 2027/28 ensuring inflationary pressures are matched by increases in fees and income or reductions in expenditure. However, this relies on significant savings targets being achieved each year and inflation reducing in the medium term and government funding in line with that projected in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The Council is continuing to deliver its ambitious programmes to redevelop and regenerate the town centre and to provide more social, affordable, and aspirational homes. Whilst both programmes offer great opportunities for the town and residents, they also carry the risk of

potentially needing more resources. There is a ringfenced reserve for Regeneration and further estimates of resources have been included in the General Fund MTFs.

Capital Strategy

The Council also has a five-year Capital Strategy. The purpose of the Capital Strategy is to show how the Council determines its priorities for capital investment, how much it can afford to borrow and sets out any associated risks. All capital schemes are regularly reviewed 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.

For a number of years capital spend has been prioritised due to the limited availability of capital receipts and the Council's ability to afford borrowing costs. Accordingly, the council applied a 'fix on fail' approach to assets with no significant asset improvements being funded, except for those supported through external funding or partially through external funding (for example Garage Improvement programmes). This approach cannot be sustained in the medium to long term as it will lead to a gradual degradation of the Council's assets with reactive works only being undertaken to keep sites wind and watertight. Sustaining such an approach in the medium term will inevitably lead to closure of buildings even before consideration is given to the legal requirements in terms of Energy Performance Certificate (EPC's) and other legal and climate change requirements.

To address the issues above, The General Fund Capital Strategy Overview - Priorities versus Funding Requirement 2023/24-2029/30 report to Executive 15 November 2023 set out the Council's key capital regeneration and community asset ambitions and key land and asset disposals, to determine a funding strategy to meet corporate objectives and address the issues outlined above.

The following priority schemes / activities require a funding strategy:

- Regeneration SG1- Public Sector Hub, Leisure Centre and Theatre
- Climate Change - green fleet, buildings (operational, community and commercial)
- Towns fund programme where match funding is required
- Operational need investment in Community Assets
- Response to Legislative changes e.g. waste and recycling
- Protection of key income streams to ensure the financial resilience of the General Fund

Housing Revenue Account

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan is the Council's strategic plan for managing and maintaining its housing stock. It sets out the Council's short-to-medium term plans and priorities for its housing management services and provides a long-term (30 year) perspective on stock investment and financial planning. The plan was originally adopted by the Council's Executive in November 2014 following consultation with the Housing Management Board. The Business Plan is reviewed regularly to reflect changing circumstances as well as tenant and Councillor priorities. The HRA Business Plan was fully reviewed in 2023/24 to ensure a balanced HRA financial plan for the next 30 years and to ensure there are sufficient HRA funds to support the Council's Housebuilding and Acquisitions Programme as well as reflect new requirements placed on social housing providers under the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, eg the decent homes standard and building regulations and environmental improvements like decarbonisation of the Council's housing stock as well as compliance with revised consumer standards and a new inspection regime. The latest version of the Business Plan was approved by the Executive on 15th November 2023.

The Council's HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy looks at these plans over a five-year horizon in greater detail setting out the principles which generates the need for Financial Security targets.

The Council's housing stock represents its most valuable asset and the largest liability in investment terms. The condition of properties is also of central importance to tenants, and they consistently select the improvement of their homes and a good repairs service as their top priorities. Ensuring finite resources are used in the most cost-effective manner is key to the Council's asset management and business planning approach. To reflect new government reforms such as the new

Building Safety Act and Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 as well as decarbonisation to limit climate change, the Housing Asset Management Strategy has been reviewed and a new Strategy was agreed by the Executive in November 2023. The new Housing Asset Management Strategy (2023 to 2028) sets out the framework under which the investment in existing stock detailed in the HRA Business Plan (2023) will be achieved. The Strategy will direct the Council's investment priorities. It identifies how the Council will ensure that residents living in Stevenage Borough Council homes will remain safe, involved, informed and have a good quality home. The strategy also sets out how the Council will meet the requirements of the new regulatory framework for social housing along with other legislation.

The Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031 sets out how Stevenage will develop in the future. The plan seeks to provide around 7,600 new homes, alongside new jobs and community facilities. It provides the basis for the regeneration of the town centre, which includes plans for new homes, shops, offices, coffee bars, restaurants and seeks to create a centre people can be proud of. It also protects green infrastructure and historic assets, to ensure people can continue to have a good quality of life in the town.

Climate Change

Climate Change has now reached a point where we must all take immediate action. With its declaration of a climate emergency in June 2019, Stevenage Borough Council is committed to tackling this. The Council has a holistic vision which focuses on cutting its own emissions to net zero and supporting the town's businesses and residents to do the same by 2030. The Council's Climate Change Strategy sets out how the Council plans to achieve this and the action everyone can take which will have the most far-reaching impacts. The steps the Council is taking to ensure a climate safe future will also have significant positive impacts on health and wellbeing within the community as the Council looks to champion warm, energy efficient housing and the protection of green space. Following the climate emergency declaration, the Council has been working to understand what action can be taken to not only reduce the carbon outputs of its assets and activity, but also in what ways it can act as a community leader to empower the whole town to take action. The declaration was a direct result of collective action from ordinary citizens, and therefore the Council believes the response should be community led.



Understanding the emissions will involve building up a detailed picture of what Stevenage's outputs are.

Lead the way by ensuring Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) is producing as little greenhouse gases as possible as quickly as possible

Advocating for and facilitating real change will see SBC lobbying for more drastic action at County and Central Government level, as well as aiding local stakeholders' efforts to shrink their carbon footprints.

The response to the climate change emergency will be resident led which means the community will be fully involved throughout the process.

SBC will utilise this opportunity to improve our residents' quality of lives, by striving to end fuel poverty, improve the built environment to encourage the shift to active travel and making healthy plant based food accessible.

Clear targets will be set with regular monitoring in place.

Progress of significant governance action to facilitate compliance with the CIPFA/SOLACE Governance Framework:

Balancing the Budget: A review of the 30-year Housing Revenue Account Business Plan has been carried out to incorporate new government requirements, welfare and social reforms and inflationary pressures. The new Business Plan was agreed at Executive November 2023.

The Council needed to find general fund savings of £1.2M to ensure a balanced budget for 2024/25. The identified savings were agreed at Executive in November 2023. The 'Balancing the Budget' priority has a number of workstreams. Both the Transformation and the Co-operative Commercial Insourcing Strategy have contributed significantly to achieving the 2024/25 'Balancing the Budget' savings target resulting in no service cuts being proposed for 2024/25 with the exception to changes to football pitches.

For a number of years capital spend has been prioritised due to the limited availability of capital receipts and the Council's ability to afford borrowing costs. Accordingly, the council applied a 'fix on fail' approach to assets with no significant asset improvements being funded, except for those supported through external funding or partially through external funding (for example Garage Improvement programmes). This approach cannot be sustained in the medium to long term as it will lead to a gradual degradation of the Council's assets with reactive works only being undertaken to keep sites wind and watertight. Sustaining such an approach in the medium term will inevitably lead to closure of buildings even before consideration is given to the legal requirements in terms of Energy Performance Certificate (EPC's) and other legal and climate change requirements. To address the issues above, The General Fund Capital Strategy Overview - Priorities versus Funding Requirement 2023/24-2029/30 report to Executive 15 November 2023 set out the Council's key capital regeneration and community asset ambitions and key land and asset disposals, to determine a funding strategy to meet corporate objectives and address the issues outlined above.

Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of outcomes requires robust monitoring and decision-making mechanisms to ensure that actions identified are sustainable within available resources.

Summary of 2023/24 Review of Effectiveness:

Financial Governance Arrangements

The Balancing the Budget programme continues to enhance the financial resilience of the Council by ensuring resources are being used effectively and efficiently and through the development of commercial and entrepreneurial skills and services.

Internal financial control is based on a framework of management information, financial regulations and administrative procedures, which include the separation of duties, management supervision, appropriate staffing structure including appropriately skilled, trained and qualified staff, and a system of delegation and accountability.

The Council's framework of internal financial control is supported by Financial Regulations and Contract Standing Orders. The regulations provide the framework for managing the Council's financial affairs. They set out the procedures that the Council has adopted for financial planning, budgeting, risk management, auditing, treasury management and procurement of goods and services. The Council's Financial Regulations and Contract Standing Orders were last reviewed and agreed by Executive in July 2020 and are both scheduled for review in 2024/25.

Monitoring performance:

The performance and quality of each corporate priority was monitored via a set of performance measures and performance against the FTFC programme and was reported to Executive each quarter. In addition to tracking progress against the delivery of the FTFC programme, performance across all Council services was monitored through the year to highlight achievements and identify areas for improvement and this was also reported to the Executive each quarter.

A performance and governance system is used to monitor performance and risk and provides insight into corporate priority delivery. The system provides a range of corporate performance monitoring relating to service delivery, finances, staff, and customers, alongside consideration of the risks associated with the delivery of objectives to provide strategic insight and facilitate prompt implementation of any necessary improvement plans.

The status of performance for both the FTFC programme and the corporate programme with proposed improvement plans, where necessary, were discussed by senior management prior to Executive on a quarterly basis. In addition, the Executive received separate regular updates on the Council's financial position and quarterly overview reports.

Staff receive training on the Council's performance management arrangements and how to input to the Council's performance system, InPhase.

All of this information provides business insight that helps to drive improvement and deliver outcomes that benefit the community.

Data Quality

Data Quality checklists for strategic and operational performance indicators are completed twice a year to record and verify the systems in place for securing the highest data quality. Assurance and confirmation of the systems in place is provided at year-end through the assurance process for service governance.

The purpose of the data quality monitoring process is to ensure that consistency and quality of corporate performance data and collection methodology is regularly reviewed and that the principles of the seven data quality principles are fulfilled. This is in line with robust corporate governance best practice and the Local Code of Corporate Governance principles.

Housing Development Programme

Stevenage Borough Council has an ambitious house building target, to deliver more social and affordable Council rented homes. The Council's house building programme is now well-established providing benefits such as homes for social and affordable rent as well as private sale homes.

The Housing Development Working Group receives updates on the Housing Development Programme. Progress of the Housing Development programme against key milestones is reported to Executive each quarter as part of the quarterly Performance Report.

New build schemes within the HRA are incorporated into the HRA Business Plan, and the General Fund schemes are reported to Executive as part of the Capital Strategy updates as well as ongoing in quarter capital monitoring with the Finance team.

The numerous contracts for the building works commissioned by the Housing Development team are monitored through monthly site meetings attended by an officer representative as well as the contractor and an independent Employers Agent whose role is to administrate the effective running of the contract.

Executive, at its meeting in January 2021 approved the setting up of a Wholly Owned Company (WOC). This will allow the Council to meet the needs identified in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment commissioned by the Council, specifically with providing housing in the private rental market. These ambitions complete the wider ambitions to develop more affordable housing, achieve wider community improvements (than just housing) and generally improve the look, appearance and functioning of neighbourhoods that the town's communities enjoy. The WOC sits alongside the existing housing delivery methods deployed by the council in terms of resources and expertise, however it has its own accounting and governance processes.

Transforming Our Town

The Council, along with its development partners, are currently delivering a major, twenty year, £1bn regeneration programme designed to transform Stevenage. The programme will deliver [a](#) new transport infrastructure, commercial space, retail, spaces for leisure, arts and culture, and town centre living.

The council is working with private sector partners to deliver large elements of this transformation. This includes a partnership with Mace for the delivery of SG1. The £350 million SG1 scheme comprises a 14.5-acre site in Stevenage town centre which includes a minimum of 1700 new homes, 60,000 sq feet of ground floor retail and restaurant space, new public spaces and a public services hub, combining community assets such as health services, library, voluntary sector, café and Council offices.

Funding has also been secured through national Government opportunities. The Stevenage Development Board was formed in March 2020 to lead the development of a Town Investment Plan. In March 2021 the Board secured £37.5 million of 'Towns Fund' funding from the then Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to support the regeneration of the town through the delivery of a range of projects which will provide greater retail, culture, and work / skills development opportunities for local people.

Stevenage Development Board oversees the investment being made as part of the Government's Towns Fund initiative. The work of the board has prioritised projects in Culture & Heritage, Sustainable Transport, Town Centre Regeneration, and Skills & Employment. This includes improving the infrastructure in the town and investing in facilities, creating employment and skills opportunities for local people, and attracting investment in the internationally recognised life sciences sector.

Projects funded through the Towns Fund initiative include a new Multi-Storey Car Park which is adjacent to Stevenage Railway station, with secure cycle storage to improve connectivity and wider transport links for residents and visitors. The new parking facility, which opened in May 2023, almost doubles the capacity of the former surface level with 622 spaces, includes blue badge parking and spaces for electric vehicles.

Construction is underway on the former Matalan site. The Guinness Partnership is delivering new homes, and this is taking place in phases. As a result of additional funding from Homes England, the overall plans involve the construction of 526 one and two-bedroomed apartments along with flexible commercial space at street level which aims to create active street frontages. Lovell Partnerships, appointed by The Guinness Partnership, began work earlier this year on the first phase of the scheme. This will deliver 143 new homes which will all be affordable. This is expected to be finished at the end of 2024/early 2025, with further phases set to follow.

Community Wealth Building

Community wealth building is a new people-centred approach to local economic development, which directs wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people. Stevenage Borough Council passed a motion on 29 January 2020 in support of Community Wealth Building. This included a commitment to launch a Cooperative and Inclusive Economy Charter.

Some examples of how the town can work together to bring about an inclusive economy include:

- Shopping locally;
- Officering work placements and apprenticeships, and
- Using local supply chains

The Council has produced a Community Wealth Building Strategy. Community Wealth Building focuses on how much money is held and reinvested in an area for the benefit of local communities. For the Council, this relates to how much business it does with local suppliers and how it supports local people to connect to, and drive forward, a sustainable and inclusive economy. At the heart of the

strategy is making sure that the economy works for everyone. This has identified four key foundations that underpin an inclusive economy:

- Procurement and social value
- Training and skills
- Cooperative and social economy growth and
- Tackling climate change.

The council has just successfully completed leading on the delivery of a £750,000 project to support the development of Community Wealth Building throughout Hertfordshire. Working with all District & Borough Council colleagues throughout the county. This project aimed to delivery a delegated grants scheme as well as projects around Procurement, Strategic Planning and the strengthening of the existing Hertfordshire Opportunities Portal. Building on this over the next two years will be the availability of UK Shared Prosperity Funding, with £185,000 directly supporting Community Wealth Building Endeavours in Stevenage. These activities are monitored by a cross-county working group comprised of colleagues from across Hertfordshire which in Stevenage reports to a Community Wealth Building Board chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Community Wealth Building.

To support the Council's approach to Community Wealth Building a Cooperative Inclusive Economy Charter for Stevenage was agreed by Executive in July 2020. A Cooperative Inclusive Economy encourages communities, organisations, and businesses to work together, helping to shape the economy and to share the benefits of growth. The Charter's aim is to create a fairer society and a more resilient economy for everyone, residents, organisations and businesses. The Charter is underpinned by an action plan and includes a space for communities and stakeholders to pledge their support.

The project is delivering against the following five work streams:

- Hertfordshire Opportunities Portal
- Procurement
- Grants scheme
- Planning
- Evaluation and Feasibility

Building on this work, in March 2024, the council approved the 'Stevenage Works: Skills Framework' which looks to build the councils ambitions around skills with a focus on providing opportunity for Stevenage residents in key sectors. At the heart of this approach is a connection with people-centric focus of Community Wealth Building and further helps to build on the Council's ambitions in this area. At its heart there are three key elements to the framework:

- Aligning & Co-ordinating Local Partners, Assets & Resources
- Augmenting Skills Provision to Create Further Opportunity
- Backing Skills Provision with Capital Investment link to our Regeneration Plans

Social Value Portal

The Council uses a social value portal to monitor, measure and manage the tendering and delivery of social value through contracts and other business-related activities. The aim of this is to understand what value business brings to society, according to the principles of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012. The Social Value Portal uses the National Social Value Measurement Framework, also known as the National TOMs (Themes, Outcomes Measures), to measure social value. The National TOMS framework was developed by the National Social Value Taskforce and was the result of extensive consultation across its members and is endorsed by the Local Government Association.

Procurement

The Council adopted its Co-operative Procurement Strategy (2021-2024) in October 2021. The focus of the strategy is around five principle foundations including Community Wealth Building, Sustainability, Social Value and Ethical Procurement, Commercial and Insourcing and Pro-active Procurement. Each foundation is a building block of the consideration that need to underpin the procurement process and are embedded in the way the Council procures goods, works and services.

The Council has joined with other Hertfordshire local authorities and public bodies to work together in procurement and partnership projects for the benefit of all participating authorities. As part of this partnership, the Council has a portal called Supply Hertfordshire that holds information about advertised opportunities and participating authorities.

Transformation Programme

In August 2021, the Executive agreed a Transformation Programme aimed at improving customer satisfaction, increasing workforce productivity and organisational resilience, while achieving the savings required by the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. This programme forms a significant element of the 'Balancing the Budget Programme and will help the Council achieve its financial security targets.

New Leisure Contract

The Council has entered into a new ten-year Active Communities Leisure Management contract. The new agreement with Everyone Active began on 1st April 2023. The UK leisure operator prides itself on being a community-focused organisation and will introduce this approach to residents of the town. Everyone Active supports the Council's vision for leisure across Stevenage by producing attractive facilities available to all age groups in the town's community and contribute to the health and wellbeing objectives of the Council.

Progress of significant governance action to facilitate compliance with the CIPFA/SOLACE Governance Framework:

Commercialism: To ensure that the Council's ambitious commercial agenda can be achieved, the following action has been carried out: The Commercial and Insourcing Strategy 2023-2026 was agreed by Executive at its meeting in October. The strategy outlines the Council's approach to operating commercially

This will be achieved through maximising opportunities to insource services, the delivery of business process improvements and the generation of new or enhanced sources of revenue. The commercial culture across the organisation will continue to be developed, to ensure that staff are equipped with the right skills to deliver.

New fees and charges for 2024/25 were agreed by Executive in October 2023. Commercialisation work this year has included: aligning commercial and transformation (such as for Digital Garage Lettings and third-party tipping), enhanced income from concessions contracts based on a revenue share agreement (such as for advertising and sponsorship and parcel lockers). Options for new income streams are progressing and reports with proposals will come forward in due course. The Member-led Commercial and Investment Working Group continues to meet quarterly.

Information regarding continued enhancement activity proposed for 2024/25 is outlined in the Planned Improvement Activity for 2024/25 section at the end of this document

Progress of significant governance action to facilitate compliance with the CIPFA/SOLACE Governance Framework:

Socio-Economic Impacts: As a result of the combined socio-economic impacts of welfare reform, the COVID-19 pandemic, and an economic downturn the following actions have been carried out:

Funding of £300K is being received in instalments and is being used to support local small businesses. This is part of the Mission 44 funding, and the Council is working with schools to encourage STEM learning to ensure better prospects for young people. The Social Inclusion Partnership has been set up under the umbrella of Stevenage Together to share information about services and applying for funding collaboratively. It is made up of voluntary sector organisations who have come together and is being supported by the Council and Citizens Advice Stevenage.

The Welfare Reform Group continues to meet. A dashboard is being used to inform the Council's understanding of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis locally. Data is collected from colleagues and partners who attend Welfare Reform Group meetings. The dashboard is made up of 13 different measures which are analysed quarterly to inform the Council's and partners' understanding of local trends.

The Council's website contains information to help residents to manage the cost of living and this is updated regularly with new advice and how to access grants and benefits.

A new Collection and Engagement IT solution to allow focus on high-risk Universal Credit claim cases is being procured. The new system will automate many tasks required to reach customers in arrears and will enable early intervention and assist with proactive management of arrears cases.

The Council has partnered with Sustainable X to deliver a fully funded Sustainable Support Programme for local businesses to support key learning of sustainable practices and opportunities for businesses. The programme includes skills and training support on sustainable supply chain management and wider stakeholder engagement. The programme launched on 28th September with a Sustainable Meet the Buyer event, providing unique collaboration opportunities for both buyers and suppliers. It also offers participants the chance to grow their network with potential supply chain connections too.

Information regarding continued enhancement activity proposed for 2024/25 is outlined in the Planned Improvement Activity for 2024/25 section at the end of this document

Progress of significant governance action to facilitate compliance with the CIPFA/SOLACE Governance Framework:

Council House Building and Acquisition:

- The Council has received grant funding of £10.6M from Homes England as part of their Affordable Homes Programme. This will be used to build a new Independent Living Scheme.
- Regular updates continue to be provided at Housing Development and Regeneration meetings.
- Performance indicators in relation to number of affordable homes delivered by the Council and number of private homes provided is included in the quarterly performance report which is reported to Executive.
- Delivery of 190 new homes in 2023/24, including the first phase of Kenilworth Close. This also sees the delivery of seven new retail units.
- Two new schemes for 156 homes at Brent Court and Shephall View have recently received planning permission. Consultation and submission to Planning has taken place on four new schemes for a total of 403 new homes which will form a key part of the programme going forwards.

Information regarding continued enhancement activity proposed for 2024/25 is outlined in the Planned Improvement Activity for 2024/25 section at the end of this document

Progress of significant governance action to facilitate compliance with the CIPFA/SOLACE Governance Framework:

Repairs and Voids:

- A fencing programme has been put in place by the Housing Investment team which aims to clear the historic backlog during 2023/24 and 2024/25.
- Changes to ways of working for the Repairs Supervisors and Maintenance Surveyors have been introduced to increase first time fix rates, productivity, and customer satisfaction.
- A service review of both Voids and Repairs was completed along with a scrutiny review of the Repairs Service by the Community Select Committee. The agreed recommendations have/will feed into improvement plans to be delivered over the next 12-18 months.
- Following a review of current arrangements, new interim contractors were appointed to support the Repairs Service, including for specialist works such as roofing, pending a procurement process to award longer-term contracts in 2024/25.
- 'Booking Hub' the new online reporting tool for repairs, which will allow customers to select their own repair appointment times, has been released in-house and testing is being carried out. Once this is complete, the system will be rolled out to residents.

Information regarding continued enhancement activity proposed for 2024/25 is outlined in the Planned Improvement Activity for 2024/25 section at the end of this document

Principle E: Leadership capacity and capability

Principle E: Developing the organisation’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it. The appropriate structures and leadership, as well as people with the right skills and values, enable the Council to operate efficiently and effectively and achieve the best possible outcomes for the community.

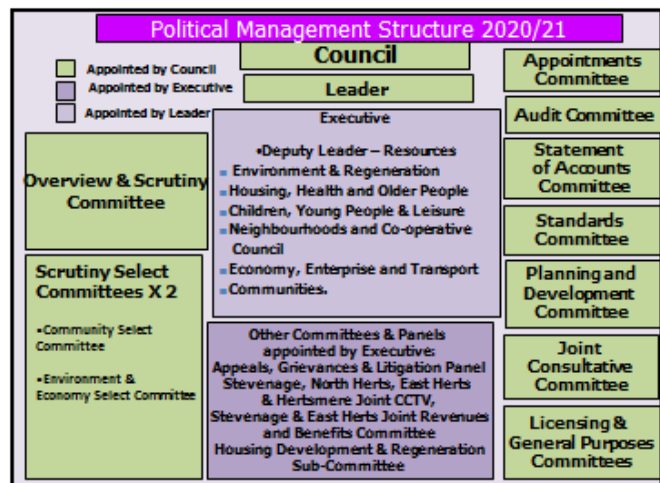
Summary of 2023/24 Review of Effectiveness:

The Council’s Political Management Structure:

The Political Management Structure diagram summarises the Council’s political structure.

All Councillors meet together as the Council. Meetings are generally open to the public and feature a main topical debate item.

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 and accountable to local people. The Monitoring Officer ensures that the Constitution remains fit for purpose, that legal requirements are met and that the public interest is paramount in all decision making.



Executive, Council and Overview and Scrutiny meetings are recorded and are available via You Tube which means that members and the public can view these meetings at a time convenient to them. This has the benefit of improving scrutiny and reaching a wider audience.

Appendix Two

Audit Committee meets quarterly, and its duties include advising and commenting on internal and external audit matters, treasury management, anti-fraud and corruption issues, risk management and governance, the Council's Constitution in respect of Contract Standing Orders and Financial Regulations and the Statement of Accounts and related Capital determinations. The Audit Committee has been constituted in line with best practice recommendations from CIPFA guidance.

The Council has structured its processes and procedures for the Executive and Scrutiny Committees plus other Committees such as the regulatory ones, to minimise the risk of it acting in contravention of its own policies and external laws and regulations. The Council also appoints officers qualified to undertake statutory responsibilities, such as:

- Chief Financial Officer (Strategic Director (Chief Finance Officer)) as contained within Section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.
- Monitoring Officer (Borough Solicitor) to meet Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

There is a Modern Members Programme which provides Members with a programme of training to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to ensure effective and informed decision making. This training programme covers essential skills such as understanding budgets as well as topical items and briefing on new legislation. The Modern Members Programme is arranged for all elected members, based on their feedback and requests. There is also a programme of induction training and meetings with key officers for newly elected Members.

The Council's Officer Structure:

The Council aims to create a flexible, collaborative, creative and modern workforce to ensure the Council can deliver the priorities set out in its Corporate Plan and give residents the standard of services they expect.

The senior leadership team has been structured to drive the development of a sustainable, customer orientated and commercial operating model. The model is focused upon delivering the right services to the right standards, at the right time for the town's residents and businesses, using the most cost/resource effective delivery models.

The Council uses a Human Resources Management system to support workforce planning, training, development and the implementation of the Council's competency framework structure. The Council's Competency Framework provides a map of the behaviours, as well as the skills, that are valued and recognised by the Council.

The Council has a staff Performance and Improvement Policy and Manager Toolkit, as well as associated policies (Absence Management, Dignity at Work, Disciplinary, Grievance and Appeals policies, Organisational Change Policy, Sickness Absence Policy, Social Media Policy) to encourage all employees to personally deliver the highest standards of service possible and for managers to proactively address performance issues. The Council has a rolling appraisal process called REAL Conversations with regular meeting arrangements providing a framework for achieving the best performance on a day-to-day basis. These conversations typically include objectives, development, engagement and wellbeing, but they are also tailored to individuals.

Arrangements reflect those summarised in the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance – No significant requirements to enhance governance have been identified.

Principle F: Managing Risks – The Council's risk governance arrangements

Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management. Risk management, together with a strong system of financial management are integral parts of a performance management system and are crucial to the achievement of outcomes.

Summary of 2023/24 Review of Effectiveness:



Risk Management

The Council consider and counter risk across a broad range of areas. The Council has an approved Risk Management Policy and a Risk Management Guide is available to all employees. Strategic risks are linked to the Council's priorities and the Strategic Risk Register is reviewed and monitored on a quarterly basis. Operational risks are also developed and monitored.

A Corporate Risk Management Group meets quarterly to oversee and review the process and development of the Council's approach to risk. Risks are reviewed by the Council's Senior Leadership Team each quarter and then reported to the Executive and Audit Committee quarterly.

To support service delivery improvements, the Council welcomes constructive challenge as a result of scrutiny from internal/external audit

activity, the work programme of Overview and Scrutiny Committee and other external review agencies and inspectorates.

The Council expects the highest standards of conduct and integrity from all who have dealings with it including staff, members, contractors, and the public. It is committed to the elimination of fraud and corruption and to ensure that all activities are conducted ethically, honestly and to the highest possible standard of openness and accountability to protect public safety and public money. To ensure this, the Council is a member of the Hertfordshire Shared Anti-Fraud Service which is operated by Hertfordshire County Council. The Shared Anti-Fraud service is a fraud prevention and investigation service. The service also works with the Council to ensure it has the right strategies, policies, training, awareness and understanding of fraud prevention methods and ensures that staff are skilled and trained appropriately to prevent fraud. The Shared Anti-Fraud Service's annual Action Plan ensures compliance with best practice issued by central government, National Audit Office and CIPFA. The Service reports quarterly to Audit Committee on its work.

To prevent or report fraud, the Council has an Anti-fraud and Corruption Policy as well as a Whistle-blowing Policy, Anti-Bribery and Fraud Sanctions policies.

Risk Management and Treasury Management Training was offered to Members of the Audit Committee in January 2024. Fraud prevention training was offered to all Members in February 2024.

Information Technology

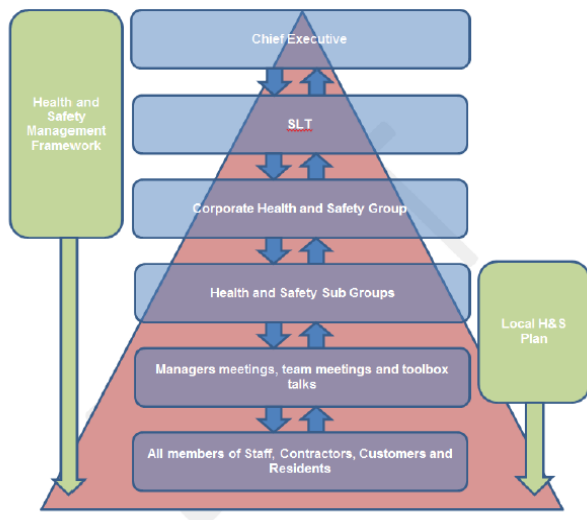
The ability to identify and assimilate new technologies is an integral part of the Council's aim to achieving its strategic objectives. The Council has a Shared ICT service with East Herts District Council. The shared ICT service is responsible for developing the shared ICT platform as well as delivering ICT services.

A joint Stevenage/East Herts ICT Partnership Board meets every month to consider the strategic direction of the service. A Joint (Member led) Committee Board, to review the ICT Improvement Programme meets quarterly.

The ICT service is committed to embracing new digital opportunities to better meet the needs of residents, achieve savings and transform services. A secure, resilient, effective, and forward-looking Technology Service is critical in delivering these aims.

Health and Safety

Figure 14: Council's Health and Safety Framework



To ensure and maintain corporate wide oversight and clarity on health and safety compliance and performance across the Council, a corporate health and safety governance structure is in place that provides assurance to senior management that health and safety assessments and activity across the Council are being effectively managed. Assistant Directors have ensured that health and safety responsibilities at each level of management within their business units are clear. An ongoing schedule of review by Assistant Directors and internal/external peers is providing assurance that key health and safety risks are being suitably controlled while identifying areas where improvements can be made and including these into the ongoing action plan. Senior management representation on the Strategic

Health and Safety Group ensures the group is providing senior management with the assurances that are required. The Council has a complete database of health and safety risk assessments for all services.

Embedding of the Health and Safety framework is being achieved by a process of internal and external audits, peer reviews, shadow health and safety inspections, risk assessment reviews, training to upskill managers, health and safety group meetings, hazard monitoring and action plans

Alongside e-learning health and safety packages there is now a range of toolbox talks available, plus courses on Risk Assessment, Construction, Design and Management Regulations, Manual Handling, COSHH, Hand Arm Vibration, Legionella, Needle sticks, Sharps and Diseases, Hot Works, and Noise.

Business Continuity

The Council has business continuity plans for all of its key services and a Corporate Business Continuity Plan is in place to manage the corporate response to an incident. A full review of each service's Business Impact Analysis has recently been carried out to reflect new ways of working since the Covid pandemic and these are currently being reflected in updated service business continuity plans.

Information and Records Governance

New General Data Protection Regulations were approved by the EU Parliament on 14 April 2016 and were enforced on 25 May 2018. The primary objectives of these regulations are to give citizens and residents control of their personal data and to simplify the regulatory environment.

Overall responsibility for information management at the Council has been assigned to the Council's Information and Records Governance Manager. The Council has identified and documented its information assets and data flows and developed an information asset register.

The Council has a Data Protection Policy as well as an Information Security Incident Management Policy and Procedure which defines the Council's procedures in response to any actual or suspected data security incident. Specific guidance on records management with defined responsibilities of information asset owners has been developed. Document retention guidance has been produced and communicated to all members of staff, which includes a defined and enforced corporate records retention schedule in line with the requirement of the GDPR and good practice. There are also defined procedures in place for the disposal and destruction of information. All staff are required to complete GDPR e-learning and keep their knowledge up to date.

Building Safety and Social Housing Compliance

A current key focus for local authorities, housing associations and landlords is to ensure compliance with the new Building Safety Act and the Social Housing Regulation Act.

Building Safety Act

The new Building Safety Act received Royal Assent in April 2022. The Act focuses on the safety of 'higher-risk buildings (buildings which are at least 18 metres or 7 storeys high with 2 or more residential units) from design stage through to management once occupied. It is the government's response to the Grenfell Tower fire and recommendations from the subsequent Hackitt review.

The Act give residents and homeowners more rights, powers and protection. It will deliver protections for qualifying leaseholders from the costs associated with remediating historical building safety defects and a toolkit of measures that will allow those responsible for building safety defects to be held to account

The Act creates three new bodies to provide effective oversight of the new regime: the Building Safety Regulator, the National Regulator of Construction Products and the New Homes Ombudsman.

Many of the detailed provisions in the Act will be implemented through a programme of secondary legislation. The Building Safety Act 2022 will be fully enforceable by October 2024, although some areas of the Act will become enforceable earlier.

Fire Safety Act

In addition, on 1st October 2023, new fire safety guidance came into force for all buildings regulated by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. The new regulations improve cooperation and coordination between Responsible Persons, increase requirements in relation to the recording and sharing of fire safety information, make it easier for enforcement authorities to take action against non-compliance, and ensure residents have access to comprehensive information about fire safety in their building.

These regulations make it a requirement in law for responsible persons of high-rise blocks of flats to provide information to Fire and Rescue Services to assist them to plan and, if needed, provide an effective operational response. The regulations also require responsible persons in multi-occupied residential buildings which are high-rise buildings, as well as those above 11 metres in height, to provide a range of additional safety measures. In all multi-occupied residential buildings, the regulations require responsible persons to provide residents with fire safety instructions and information on the importance of fire doors.

Social Housing Regulation Act 2023

The Social Housing Regulation Act received Royal Assent in July 2023. The Act forms a new era of regulation for the social housing sector, aiming to give tenants greater powers and improve access to quick and fair solutions to problems.). The measures will:

- Enable the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) to intervene with landlords who are performing poorly on consumer issues, such as complaints handling and decency of homes, and to act in the interest of tenants to make sure issues are rectified.
- Enable the RSH to inspect landlords to make sure they are providing tenants with the quality of accommodation and services that they deserve.
- Guarantee timely action where the RSH has concerns about the decency of a home by only requiring 48 hours' notice to a landlord before a survey is carried out.
- Provide powers for the RSH to arrange emergency repairs of tenants' homes (following a survey and where there is evidence of systemic failure by the landlord), ensuring that serious issues are resolved rapidly where a landlord is unable or unwilling to act.

Appendix Two

- Remove the cap on the fines that the RSH can issue to a landlord who fails to meet required standards.
- Landlords must ensure that the accommodation they provide is free from serious hazards, including damp and mould, and that homes are fit for habitation. They must treat cases of damp and mould with the utmost seriousness and act promptly to protect their tenant's health.
- Require Landlords to report against Tenant Satisfaction Measures which will allow tenants to see how their landlord is performing compared to other landlords and help the RSH decide where to focus its attention.
- Ensure tenants of housing associations will be able to request information from their landlord in a similar way to how the Freedom of Information Act works for tenants of Local Authority landlords

Pages 30 to 33 outlines the proposed actions for 2023/24 and for 2024/25 to ensure compliance with the above new Act.

Progress of significant governance action to facilitate compliance with the CIPFA/SOLACE Governance Framework:

Cyber Security and IT Resilience:

- Work has been carried out to complete the actions identified in the Cyber Treatment Plan.
- SOCITM were commissioned to design the Future Operating Model for the Joint IT Service. The recommended Future Operating Model was agreed by the Joint Information Communication Technology Committee at its meeting on 2nd October 2023 and by the SBC Executive in November 2023. Funding to implement the review has been agreed by both Stevenage Borough Council and East Herts District Council.
- Work has commenced to gain Cyber Assessment Framework accreditation. The Framework provides a systematic and comprehensive approach to assessing the extent to which cyber risks to essential functions are being managed.
- The roll out of Microsoft 365 is now complete as well as the removal of unsupported servers.
- New procedures are being implemented to enhance recording, management and monitoring of software licence information and the Council's software licensing policies are being reviewed.

Information regarding continued enhancement activity proposed for 2024/25 is outlined in the Planned Improvement Activity for 2024/25 section at the end of this document

Progress of significant governance action to facilitate compliance with the CIPFA/SOLACE Governance Framework:

Corporate Health and Safety: All high risks are reviewed by the Strategic Health and Safety Group and reported to Corporate Risk Group and the Senior Leadership Team quarterly. The monitor is also reviewed by the Chief Executive at monthly HR meetings.

Information regarding continued enhancement activity proposed for 2024/25 is outlined in the Planned Improvement Activity for 2024/25 section at the end of this document

Progress of significant governance action to facilitate compliance with the CIPFA/SOLACE Governance Framework:

Compliance of the Council's Non-Housing Property: The new Asset Management System has been uploaded with commercial properties and data checks of the information are being carried out. The new Computer Aided Facilities Management System is now live.

Information regarding continued enhancement activity proposed for 2023/24 is outlined in the Planned Improvement Activity for 2023/24 section at the end of this document

Progress of significant governance action to facilitate compliance with the CIPFA/SOLACE Governance Framework:

Building and Fire Safety Acts: To deliver the proposals set out in the new Building Safety/Fire Safety Acts, which have established new legal duties for landlord and building owners of higher risk residential buildings to keep their buildings safe, the following action has been taken in 2023/24:

- Housing staff have received initial training to enable them to complete Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans and are completing these for residents of flat blocks in scope of the Act. Training continues as required.
- All buildings within scope of the Act have been inspected and this has identified remedial work. It is anticipated that remedial work will commence in 2024/25.
- The fire door inspection programme is up to date and is now an ongoing programme. Essential repairs have been carried out at the five high rise buildings pending replacement of doors.
- Floor and building plans have been developed for buildings within scope of the Act and uploaded to Fire and Rescue website, added to each building's Security Information Box and will be kept under review and amended as necessary.
- The Fire Risk Assessment Prioritisation Tool has been implemented.
- Wayfinding and signage in flat blocks within scope of the legislation has been installed or is part of an ongoing programme.
- All the required building safety cases were submitted to the Regulator by the deadline of April 2024.

Information regarding continued enhancement activity proposed for 2024/25 is outlined in the Planned Improvement Activity for 2024/25 section at the end of this document

Progress of significant governance action to facilitate compliance with the CIPFA/SOLACE Governance Framework:

Social Housing Regulation Act: To deliver the proposals set out in the new Social Housing Regulation Act, which aims to drive landlords' compliance with new consumer standards the following action has been taken in 2023/24:

- Briefed the Council's Executive, senior leaders and managers on the new Act and what the Council needs to do to comply.
- Completed a consumer regulations self-assessment toolkit provided by the Housing Quality Network
- Produced an action plan. The main themes are around policies and procedures
- A communication plan has been produced to promote housing work and encourage engagement
- Held two away days to go through specific areas of the consumer regulations with managers across the Council involved in Housing workstreams
- Implemented new tenant satisfaction measure reporting from April 2023.
- The Council's Shared Internal Audit Service carried out review of compliance with the tenant satisfaction measures, specifically data quality, accountability, reporting arrangements and governance
- Tpas (external tenant engagement consultants) have been commissioned to provide a resident engagement framework for the Council to implement.
- Bi-weekly complaints clinic has been set up to review handling of complaints
- SLT group set up to consider new complaints system, revision of policy/procedures required by the Ombudsman and the Regulator

Information regarding continued enhancement activity proposed for 2023/24 is outlined in the Planned Improvement Activity for 2023/24 section at the end of this document

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

Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability will ensure that the Council provides information regarding the completion of actions in a timely and understandable way.

Summary of 2023/24 Review of Effectiveness:

Reporting on performance, value for money, the stewardship of resources and the assessment of robust corporate governance arrangements are provided throughout the year through:

- Quarterly financial monitoring reports to Executive
- Quarterly FTFC and corporate performance status reports to Executive
- Annual publication of Statement of Accounts
- Publication of the Annual Governance Statement
- the Council's Annual Report

Compliance to provide information as outlined in the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 is monitored throughout the year by Corporate Governance Group.

The Council's internal audit provision is delivered by the Shared Internal Audit Service hosted by Hertfordshire County Council. A summary of 2023/24 arrangements is set out on pages 5 to 7 of this Statement outlining assurance for both financial and non-financial systems.

For 2023/24 the Shared Internal Audit Service assigned 'substantial' assurance for financial systems and 'reasonable' assurance to non-financial systems. Actions to enhance governance for the areas highlighted have been identified and prioritised.

Due to audit delays, at the time of writing, the Council's External Auditors, Ernst and Young, have not as yet provided their Annual Audit Letter for 2022/23, advising whether the Council's financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council at 31 March 2023 and its expenditure and income for the year then ended. The Auditors have also not as yet confirmed their opinion as to whether the Council has put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in our use of resources and that our Annual Governance Statement for 2022/23 was consistent with Ernst and Young's understanding of the Council.

Arrangements reflect those summarised in the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance – No significant opportunities to enhance governance have been identified

Planned Improvement Activity for 2024/25:

Best Value Self-Assessment

The statutory Best Value Duty is set out under section 26 of the Local Government Act (1999) and requires local authorities to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness".

In July 2023, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) launched a consultation on draft Best Value Duty (BV) guidance. In 2023/24, to help inform understanding of its own best value position, the Council undertook a self-assessment against the 7 principle 'characteristics of a well-functioning authority':

- Continuous Improvement
- Leadership
- Governance
- Culture
- Use of Resources
- Service Delivery
- Partnerships & Community Engagement

As part of this work, opportunities where the Council could build on existing good practice were identified:

Continuous Improvement

- In response to the Office for Local Government's (OfLoG) publication of local authority data, the OfLoG District Council Metrics will be added to the Council's Performance Management System in 2024/25 for quarterly monitoring and review by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)
- The Council will undertake a review of its approach to coordination of Government Single Data List returns to ensure that there is a central log of comparative data for key services
- To enhance the Council's existing approach to using data to inform business insight, an assessment of all existing business insight tools will be undertaken
- The SLT will continue to retain priority focus on workforce matters through its Workforce Strategy with specific focus on promoting the link between individual staff objectives (as captured through REALs) and the council's wider MSEB strategic priorities i.e. 'the golden thread'
- Audit of Service Assurance Statements to be added to the 2025/26 SIAS programme of work.

Leadership

- The Council will implement a budget process development model for 2025/26 which is aligned with key outcomes identified in Service Plans
- All Service Plans (currently held corporately) will be made accessible online to the SLT throughout the year via Microsoft Teams

Governance

- To enhance Member knowledge and insight of Council matters, the Council will review the scrutiny subject topics for 2024/25 and identify opportunities for future Select Committees covering a range of subjects (including site visits and external visitors where appropriate)
- Through the new Member training programme, a session on the importance of scrutiny and existing scrutiny functions will be arranged
- Introduce a single annual performance and forecast review report for Stevenage Borough Council companies
- Introduce a twice yearly SLT Complaints Report on key complaints themes identified through the Annual Complaints and Service Improvement Report

Use of Resources

- Undertake a review of the Council's approach to project management to ensure that the Council's ability to check the intended outcome of projects is assured and this is communicated to key stakeholders

Actions identified under the **Service Delivery, Culture and Partnership & Community Engagement** principles are currently being delivered through other programmes of work for 2024/25, this includes activities within Service Plans 24/25, such as commissioning the Residents & Tenants Survey 2024, the work being delivered through the IT Strategy and Action Plan, and the 5 Year Transformation Plan.

In May 2024, the Government formally published updated Best Value Guidance and work is underway within the Council to review requirements to ensure that it continues to build upon existing good practice and demonstrate ongoing fulfilment of the continuous improvement principle of the best value duty.

Significant Internal control and governance actions

Significant internal control and governance issues identified as part of the 2023/24 review of the Governance Statement identified in the relevant section throughout this Statement and set out in the following Action Plan.

Enhancement activity is deemed significant if recommended for reflection in the Annual Governance Statement by the Shared Internal Audit Service following reviews of control arrangements to meet the Audit Plan, or if identified as key to the management of 'very high/high level' strategic risks. By adopting this approach, any concerns over key controls that have a material effect on corporate governance arrangements and the associated delivery of priority outcomes should be addressed.

Action

To ensure that the General Fund Asset Management Strategy can deliver an effective mechanism to manage incoming investment as well as disposal of the Council's assets, the following activity is planned:

- Complete the implementation of new property data management software to manage the Council's assets
- Continue the review of the council's commercial portfolio
- Create a Facilities Management Service Strategy that defines the services provided, to what standard and who is responsible for delivery
- Enhance contract management arrangements with compliance contractors
- Produce a training plan for the Facilities Management service
- Produce a programme of remedial work with contractor
- Review structure for Property, Facilities Management and Estates to ensure they are adequately resourced to support the future needs of the organisation
- Procure appropriate call off contracts to support the Property and Estates functions by providing additional professional expertise
- Produce a Corporate Framework of internal responsibilities outlining the role of the corporate landlord and the occupying organisation service functions

Making Your Money Count: To ensure that the Council has sufficient resources to fund its medium and long-term service plans and corporate priorities the following activity is planned:

- Continue to find savings as part of the 2025/26 budget setting process, incorporating the work around the four transformation themes and the work of the Commercial Team
- Robustly undertake budget monitoring to ensure all costs are accurately forecasted and profiled
- Continue to look for new revenue streams

Action

Commercialisation: To ensure that the Council's ambitious Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy can be achieved, a programme of work is required:

Commercial activity in 2024/25 will focus on the growth of income from existing commercial services and concessions contracts and will see the launch of new commercial services into the marketplace. Workshops with service managers for fees and charges setting 2025/26 will commence in June 2024. As per the Insourcing Roadmap 2023-26, a review of all services provided to or on behalf of the Council by external suppliers or third parties will continue. There will also be an accompanying review of contract management processes across the Council.

As a result of the combined socio-economic impacts of welfare reform, the Covid-19 pandemic, and an economic downturn the following action is planned:

- Continue to develop and update the online Cost of Living information hub on the Council's website
- Continue to work with partners including Citizen's Advice and the Money Advice Unit to offer residents a comprehensive advice and support service
- Continue to operate and promote the Warm Spaces scheme, utilising public, community, and other buildings to offer comfort during the winter months
- Continue to promote availability of local employment opportunities and skills and training courses (including funding available to support access) to help raise awareness and confidence for people to increase income and improve their financial wellbeing.
- Develop and implement decarbonisation schemes to reduce Council and tenant costs.
- Continue to work through the Stevenage Together partnership to share learning and best practice and to co-ordinate activity where appropriate.
- Continue to work with the County and district and borough councils in Hertfordshire to share learning and best practice and to co-ordinate activity where appropriate.
- Further develop the use of the Social Value Portal to divert funding from Council contractors to local skills development and key local investment priorities.

IT Resilience and Cyber Security: The Shared IT Service to continue to implement the IT Strategy and Action Plan to enhance IT infrastructure, cyber security, IT resilience by:

- Complete the implementation of the new ICT structure
- Implement the agreed new Target Operating Model for the ICT service (the new structure and roles and governance structure).
- Further develop cyber security policies
- Gain Cyber Assessment Framework Accreditation
- Complete the actions contained in the Cyber Treatment Plan
- Continue the work to implement new procedures to enhance recording, management and monitoring of software licence information and review the Council's software licensing policies

Health and Safety: Continue to enhance and embed health and safety compliance and performance by:

- Continue the rolling programme of internal and external audits for medium and high-risk services
- Complete the implementation of health and safety enhancements for the Council's identified health and safety risks

Action

Council Housebuilding and Acquisitions Programme: To ensure the Council can deliver new council owned homes as programmed the following action is planned:

- Appointment of principal contractors for pipeline schemes currently progressing through Planning
- Completion of Dunn Close and Courtlands schemes for a total of 44 new homes
- Ongoing work to secure additional external funding for major projects including The Oval

Repairs and Voids To enhance the Repairs and Voids service, the following action is planned:

- Deliver improvement plan for Repairs including:
 - Continue to consider opportunities to upskill the workforce and maximise productivity.
 - Procurement of support contractors – to demonstrate VFM and ability to deliver to required quality and timescales in accordance with agreed service standards.
 - Make best use of technology – for example leverage the benefits of mobile solutions to capture tasks and manage workflow. Frontline teams to be enabled to view existing repairs and raise new repairs.
 - Improve diagnosis of repairs at first point of contact.
 - Customer engagement – to help shape new service model, demonstrate learning from complaints. Improve communications with customers and their perceptions of and satisfaction with the service.
 - Service delivery framework - to enhance collaboration between asset management and repairs teams balanced with clear accountabilities.
- Deliver improvement plan for Voids including:
 - procurement of voids contractor
 - business case for future delivery model to be presented to Executive for approval
- Cross-cutting actions:
 - establish client/contractor functions and review staffing resources.
 - review policies, processes, and procedures.
 - set out clear service standards for which we can be held accountable for by customers.
 - benchmarking: costs, standards, and performance

Corporate Capacity: To ensure the Council has the capacity to carry out all of its priorities as well as provide its core services and implement new government requirements as they arise the following actions are planned:

- Creation of service plans for 2024/25 in all service areas to ensure resource planning
- HR team to continue working with service leadership teams to prioritise recruitment and associated support plans
- Roll out of new Workforce Strategy

Social Housing Regulation Act: To deliver the proposals set out in the Social Housing Regulation Act which will give tenants greater powers, improve access to swift and fair redress and enhance the powers of the Regulator of Social Housing, the following action is planned:

- Development and implementation of an engagement framework 'Working Cooperatively to give Tenants a Voice Strategy'

Action

- Through the work of the Executive Housing Working Group implement the process for benchmarking the 12 Tenant Perception measures and 10 management data measures which local authorities will be required to report on from March 2024
- Continue with the rolling 5-year stock condition survey programme.
- Develop and publish a new Communications Plan
- Review and approve new Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy
- Review end to end processes to ensure compliance with the Social Housing Regulation Act including Awaab’s Law once enacted and improve customer experience
- Procurement of new support contractors
- Make better use of technology including mobile solutions
- Setting and monitoring of KPI’s to manage performance (proposals for inclusion in strategic KPI suite for 2024/25)

Building and Fire Safety Acts: To deliver the proposals set out in the new Building Safety/Fire Safety Acts which have established new legal duties for landlord and building owners of higher-risk residential buildings to keep their buildings safe, the following actions is planned:

- Contractors to be appointed to carry out remedial works identified as a result of building inspections via procurement process
- Remedial work to be carried out by contractors
- Ongoing compliance monitoring to be carried out to ensure requirements of the Building and Fire Safety Acts are being met

Climate Change: To ensure Stevenage can meet the government’s net zero target for the town by 2050, the following action is planned:

- Creation of a Climate Change Risk Register to assess the effects of climate change for SBC/Stevenage
- Generation of Pathway 1,2 and 3 reports to outline current working areas and recommendations to SLT
- Launch of Climate Action Plan portal
- Produce a Climate Change Action Plan based on the Climate Change Risk Register
- Promote government schemes and grants to the public to encourage decarbonisation town wide
- Upgrade the SBC Local Plan to include improved Climate Change considerations
- Work with businesses in Stevenage to encourage sustainable procurement
- Bid to central government for funding SBC lead carbon reduction projects.

Digital Switchover: To ensure that there is no disruption as a result of the changeover from analogue to digital lines the following action is planned:

- Convert careline telephone lines at the Council’s Independent Living Schemes by October 2024
- Identify and convert any remaining analogue lines within the Council’s commercial and housing stock.

Action

Court Cost Management: To enhance arrangements for managing court costs, the following actions is planned:

- Procedures for capturing and recording expected income from court costs/compensation awarded and assigning associated roles and responsibilities
- Mechanisms to monitor cases where judgements have been made in favour of the Council and costs/compensation awarded.

Approval of Statement:

Approval of Statement by Chief Executive and Leader of the Council

We have been advised on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by the Strategic Leadership Team, relevant officers and the Audit Committee, and that the arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework. Areas to enhance the governance framework already addressed are summarised in this Annual Governance Statement. Areas to be addressed and ensure continuous improvement are set out in the table above on pages 31-35.

We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters, to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Signed
 Date
 Cllr Richard Henry
 Leader of Stevenage Borough Council

Signed
 Date
 Matthew Partridge
 Chief Executive of Stevenage Borough Council

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Corporate Backbone

A. Behaving with Integrity

B. Stakeholder Engagement

C. Defining Outcomes

D. Determining Interventions

E. Leadership Capacity and Capability

F. Managing Risk

G. Transparency and Accountability

Corporate Governance comprises the policies and procedures in place and values and behaviours that are needed to help ensure the organisation runs effectively, can be held to account for its actions and delivers the best possible outcomes for the community with the resources available

Key Documents

Constitution
 Member and Officer Codes of Conduct
 Member/Officer Protocols
 Register of Pecuniary Interests
 Members Allowances Scheme
 Financial Regulations
 Contract Standing Orders
 Medium Term Financial Strategy
 Capital Strategy
 Co-Operative Procurement Strategy
 General Fund Asset Management Strategy
 Housing Asset Management Strategy
 Statement of Accounts
 Corporate Plan
 Annual Report
 Equality and Diversity Policy
 Competency Framework
 Performance Framework
 Risk Management Policy & Guide
 Audit Plan
 Annual Audit Letter
 ICT User Policy
 Co-Operative Inclusive Economy Charter and Social Value Portal

ICT User Policy
 HRA Business Plan
 Workforce Plans
 Disciplinary Policy
 Recruitment Policy
 R.E.A.L. Conversations Policy
 Job Evaluation Policy
 Corp Health and Safety Policies
 Data Protection Policy
 Freedom of Information Policy
 Information Security Policy
 Whistle Blowing Policy
 Anti-Fraud & Corruption Policy
 Anti-Money Laundering Policy
 Anti-Bribery Policy
 Fraud Sanctions Policy
 Complaints Policy & Procedures
 Business Continuity Plans
 Social Media Policy
 Local Plan
 Data Quality Policy
 Gifts and Hospitality Register
 Policy for Handling Personal Data
 Document Retention Guidance
 Community Engagement Framework

Contributory Processes/Regulatory Monitoring

Annual Governance Statement
 Audit and Standards Committee
 Overview & Scrutiny Arrangements
 Head of Paid Service
 Independent Officer
 Section 151 Officer
 Monitoring Officer
 Financial Reporting
 Modern Member Programme
 Corporate Risk Group
 Corporate Governance Group
 Housing Management Advisory Board
 Council's Values and Behaviours
 Health & Safety Framework
 Strategic Health and Safety Group
 Health and Safety Sub Groups
 Intranet and Council's Website
 Publication Scheme
 Freedom of Information Procedures
 Council Tax Leaflet/Information
 Customer Feedback process
 Equality Impact Assessments
 Officers Capital Group
 Data Protection Impact Assessments
 Corporate Compliance Group

Council's Financial Security Group
 Staff Satisfaction Surveys
 Member and Staff Induction
 External Audit
 Shared Internal Audit Service
 Shared Anti-Fraud Service
 Shared Services Agreements
 Strategic Partnership Agreements
 Shared Service Partnership Boards
 Job Descriptions & Job Evaluation process
 Schedule of Council meetings
 Overview & Scrutiny
 Contract Management training
 Learning & Development Programme
 Leadership Forum
 CE staff briefings
 Key Financial Indicators
 Data Transparency Webpage
 RIPA arrangements
 Housing Development and Regeneration Executive Committee
 Stevenage Development Board

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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