Governance Enhancement Activity carried out in 2019/20

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

Governance for this principle is currently considered robust. The following governance activity pertaining to best practice has been delivered:

- The Council's Financial Regulations have been reviewed and are due for approval by Audit Committee in March 2020.

- A new Anti Money Laundering Policy has been produced and is due for approval at Audit Committee in March 2020.

- Fraud information for staff is now available on the Council's intranet.

- Fraud e-learning is now available for staff.

Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Governance for this principle is currently considered robust. The following governance activity pertaining to best practice has been delivered:

- The Annual Report and Performance Review 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.

- New Customer Feedback Policy approved and published.

- New Freedom of Information e-learning launched.

- Mace held a public consultation to get feedback on the latest proposals for the regeneration of SG1. The event was well attended with over 500 people engaging in the process.

- Stevenage Even Better website and social media was launched and the Regeneration Visitor Centre opened.

- People in the town were asked for their views about the plans to relocate and improve the bus interchange to improve transport and connectivity links in the town.

- Consultation was carried out to seek residents' views about the Council's proposals to improve the Old Town and Roebuck Play Areas.

- Consultations regarding current and future community centre use and facilities took place with over 340 responses recorded and 42 focus group consultations. Executive approved a set of recommendations as part of the Community Centre Review in December 2019.

- Consultation was carried out to inform the creation of a new Housing Older People Strategy.

- Community Neighbourhood Management arrangements in Bedwell and Longmeadow were rolled out. '

- The Major Refurbishment Contract has promoted social value by utilising local employment, with over 40% of materials and subcontract labour being supplied by local supply chain partners.

- Proposals on Community Wealth Building approach were agreed by Council.

- Approval was given by Executive to the establishment of six Co-operative Neighbourhood areas. The six teams will form the basis of the Council's strategic approach to delivering localised, responsive, coordinated and collaborative services; working with partners, and engaging with the different communities of Stevenage.

- A series of ward walkabouts with elected members and relevant officers took place. This has informed future projects and celebrated recent successes.

- The procurement process for an integrated digital solution provider was concluded and the supplier has commenced project initiation for the replacement of the existing Customer Relationship Management system. The new software will enable integration between systems, to join up council service delivery and provide better customer facing online service channels.

- A Customer Charter developed in conjunction with the Stevenage Direct Services Change and Action Team was agreed and adopted. Built on the Council's values, the charter sets out how the service will conduct its operations and business and details what customers can expect. The charter also explains how customers can help to deliver effective services.

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

General Fund Asset Management Strategy: The General Fund Asset Management Strategy had a key action for the Council to undertake Local Asset reviews of its current land and buildings. The progress has been challenging with the restructure of the Estates section and the change in staffing personnel. The programme has however been recently reinvigorated with the following actions:

- Local Asset reviews for three wards have now taken place
- A Local Asset Review Board which includes officers from different business units and is currently sponsored by AD (Finance and Estates) has been established and now meets monthly.
- Planning colleagues have been consulted to determine viable asset management options and the Locality Review Board have recommended options which merit further work.
- New property data management software has been installed.

The current timetable for completion of the Local Asset Reviews is July 2020. The outcome should be a list of high level opportunities to be consulted on and a site disposal list

The following governance activity pertaining to best practice has been delivered:

- Hertfordshire Growth Board commissioned a development programme to help consider the implications of growth in Hertfordshire. This six month supported programme explored how issues relating to housing, infrastructure and funding can be jointly addressed in future and a forward work programme and memorandum of understanding for this has been approved.

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

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

Community Safety Document retention arrangements: Document retention arrangements in relation to the enforcement of anti-social behaviour action have been reviewed and new procedures implemented to enhance information management arrangements and ensure GDPR requirements are met. This action is now complete.

Governance of key regeneration projects: As part of the regeneration programme, the Council has partnered with Mace to deliver a £350m scheme called SG1. To ensure governance and oversight of the project, fortnightly project team meetings and monthly Steering Group meetings between the Council and Mace now take place with issues resolved through the Business Plan.

The Council has also signed a £50m development deal with Reef Estates to redevelop Queensway North. The delivery of this project is supported by a Working Group, a monthly internal Board meeting, and a quarterly Board meeting with Reef. The Housing Development and Regeneration Executive Committee's terms of reference incorporate oversight of this project and Business Plan. The Council has strategic control and influence over Queensway Properties Limited Liability Partnership and group financial statements have been produced.

Progress on key regeneration projects is reported to Housing Development and Regeneration Executive Committee and internal programme reporting takes place via the monthly FTFC Programme Board. In addition, monthly and quarterly reporting with Hertfordshire LEP takes place together with Stevenage Borough Council financial reporting to track LEP related expenditure.

On 1st November 2019, the government issued the Town Fund prospectus inviting 100 towns to develop proposals to benefit from up to £25M funding. The objective of the fund is to drive the economic regeneration of towns to deliver long term economic and productivity growth through: regeneration, planning and land use; skills and enterprise infrastructure and connectivity. In December, Executive agreed the approach and governance arrangements to enable the Council to make a Town Fund bid. A Town Fund Board has been set up and its terms of reference have been agreed. The first board meeting was held at the end of January. A workshop has been organised which will be the basis of an officer project group across the partner organisations to guide, advise and support the work plan for the Town Fund Board.

The following governance activity pertaining to best practice has also been delivered:

- A new ICT Programme Management Office has been established and is implementing procedures to ensure that ICT projects are delivered to a consistent standard with appropriate governance arrangements.
- An Information Governance Team is being created and is focussing on providing data protection training, policy roll out.
- Development Agreement with Mace was signed in April 2019 and contracts exchanged.
- A new Data Analyst is working with performance measure owners to review the potential to extract performance data automatically from systems and to input it directly into the Council's performance management system.

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

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

Corporate Capacity: Activity to implement the restructure of services through Future Council Business Reviews to improve corporate capacity and deliver sustainable services that meet the needs of customers has taken place:

- There has been a significant amount of work on Future Council Business Unit Reviews. The Fourth Tier (roles reporting to Assistant Directors) review is now almost complete across the whole Council.
- Work has commenced to establish a Fourth Tier Leadership forum and work is underway to develop a leadership vision for the Fourth tier and an aligned development programme to support and empower the Fourth tier leadership team to deliver that vision. Wider business unit skill gaps will be assessed once business unit reviews are complete and staff have been recruited for the posts.
- The Council introduced a new Managing Organisational Change policy which is more holistic and considers how to manage change and the impact on our people. Managers also received training on this at the time of launching the new policy. The Leadership Competency Framework was developed and implemented during 2016 to signal to the organisation the expected behaviours and skills that would be valued and during 2019 work has been completed to further develop this framework for Grades 1-9 and is planned to launch later this year.

The following governance activity pertaining to best practice has also been delivered:

- A Competency Framework for officers graded 1-9 is now in place.

- The Council adopted the charity Mind's Wellbeing Action Plan which helps individuals manage their mental health.

- A Fourth Tier and Senior Leadership Team Development Programme agreed and in place for the year.

- The Council's approach to sickness management was enhanced with the launch of First Care. This nurse led service provides advice and guidance on health concerns and informs managers of any sickness absence.

- Council staff attended fraud awareness training in areas such as procurement and contract fraud, housing/tenancy fraud and identify fraud.

- An e-learning package for staff and Members to raise awareness of fraud as a risk is now available.

- Stevenage Anti-Fraud Service Managers now form part of the Council's Corporate Governance Group and also sit on the Joint Action Group, which is a partnership of police and the council set up to tackle various low level but prolific or persistent offending.

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

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

Cyber Security and IT Resilience: Improvement activity has continued to ensure the Council's ICT and telephone systems continue to provide a secure and high performing ICT environment:

- A new ICT strategy and road map was approved by Executive on 9th October 2019. The ICT Strategy articulates the ICT vision and objectives now and in the future. The Partnership vision is to create a modern, secure, resilient and transformational ICT service that drives and supports delivery of joined up services to customers through the effective use of technology. Significant ICT investment has now been approved of £3.6M over two and a half years matched by East Herts Council.

- Migration of the Council's telephone system is now complete.

- A Security and Network Team has now been established.

- New email and website security software has been installed.

- The shared service storage hardware has been replaced and 99% of the Council's systems and data are running on it. The remainder is scheduled to be transferred shortly.

- Work has commenced to upgrade from Windows 7 to Windows 10

- A project to install new network security and reporting tools has commenced.

- Upgrading of Horizon VDI desktops has started and the project to install a microwave link between the data centres at Daneshill House and Cavendish Road is nearing completion.

Information Management: Improvement activity has continued to enhance and embed information management arrangements to ensure that best practice records management across the Council continues to be applied and customer data is stored securely and appropriately managed.

- Progress has been made with completion of third party information sharing agreements with over 80% of agreements completed.

- The GDPR team are continuing to work with SBC service teams and the Shared Legal Services in requiring lead partners to update relevant protocols and framework that involve the sharing of information to reflect GDPR requirements

- As part of the wider ICT Improvement Strategy, recent notable developments in GDPR related security have taken place regarding emails and internet security to protect Council data.

- Work has commenced to produce a suite of ICT Data Security Policies.

- The Council's Information Governance Manager is working in liaison with the HR team to review the next offering of mandatory e-learning GDPR training to ensure the content is relevant to Council services.

- GDPR tailored bitesize sessions were held for staff covering key topics affecting staff in their everyday working practices.

Corporate Health and Safety: Health and safety arrangements have been enhanced by:

- Training requirements appropriate to role have been identified and training is being carried out as required.

- The Health and Safety Team have delivered the IOSH Managing Safety Course for Managers.

- Alongside e-learning health and safety packages there is now a range of tool box 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.

- 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

- Twenty-one Health and Safety policies were updated

- SIAS Health and Safety Audit achieved a Good assurance opinion. SIAS concluded that monitoring and recording compliance with health and safety policies is in place. In addition, this has created action plans for teams across the Council to complete. These action plans include controls put in place to mitigate risks identified through the Council's annual risk assessment process. The Health and Safety Team take on board any lessons learnt. Induction and training arrangements are provided to help ensure all processes run smoothly.

CCTV Partnership: A thorough review of the governance framework of the CCTV Partnership was carried out and a new suite of governance arrangements, including refreshed company business plan were approved by the CCTV Joint Executive and Company Board of Directors. A follow-up SIAS audit signed all of these actions as complete in November 2019.

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

Governance for this principle is currently considered robust.