

Governance Enhancement Activity to take place in 2023/24

Corporate governance activity included in the peach text boxes are deemed significant. Activity is deemed significant if recommended for inclusion in the Annual Governance Statement by the Shared Internal Audit Service following their review of control arrangements to meet the Audit Plan or identified as key to the management of 'very high/high' level strategic risks.

To provide a complete picture of governance enhancement planned for 2023/24 activity pertaining to best practice is also reflected.

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

To enhance existing governance arrangements the following activity pertaining to best practice has been identified:

- Full review of the Council's Constitution
- IT Acceptable Use Policy to be published

Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

To enhance existing governance arrangements the following activity pertaining to best practice has been identified

- New Resident Engagement arrangements to be implemented.

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

Annual Governance Statement 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:

- Installation and Implementation of new property data management software to manage the Council's assets
- Continue the review of the council's commercial portfolio
- Deliver the Corporate Landlord function

Annual Governance Statement Action: 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:

- Complete the refresh of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan
- Carry out a review of the Council's reserves
- Develop a Capital Funding Plan to identify and progress funding sources to ensure suitable capital funding is in place to deliver the Council's priorities
- Continue to find savings as part of the 2024/25 budget setting process, incorporating the work around the four transformation themes
- Robustly undertake budget monitoring to ensure all costs are accurately forecasted and profiled
- Continue to look for new revenue streams

To enhance governance further the following activity pertaining to best practice has been identified:

- Development of a new five-year Corporate Plan

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

Annual Governance Statement Action: Commercialisation: To ensure that the Council's ambitious Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy can be achieved, the following programme of work is planned:

- The Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy is due for review in August 2023, and it is predicted that as part of the plan for financial sustainability there will be a greater focus on income generating services across the Council. This is likely to involve the setting of commercial Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for key income generating services across the Council and developing plans for growth and marketing. Work will continue with the Garage Services team to protect and enhance this crucial revenue stream.
- The Commercial team will play a key role in setting fees and charges for 2024/25 and will continue to focus on identifying new income streams, with particular focus on opportunities in planning and grounds maintenance.
- With the Council's offer for filming in the borough and for advertising and sponsorship of both assets and events firmly established, growing the income in these areas will be a priority.
- Aligned with the Council's commitment to insourcing, work will continue to assess the options outlined on the Insourcing Roadmap for 2022-24, with particular attention being paid to opportunities around void clearances and property management services.
- The Commercial team will continue their work supporting the Housing team and consequently, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). This will be through support with the review of the recharging procedure for tenants and the exploration of opportunities around the expansion of Careline and Community Support services.

Annual Governance Statement Action: COVID-19: In response to the COVID-19 crisis and to ensure the Council can reinstate and continue to deliver services, continue to meet its FTFC ambitions, the following action is planned:

- Continue to review the General Fund and HRA Medium Term Financial strategies in light of the financial pressures arising from COVID-19 and the impact this had on key income streams.

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

- To prioritise work with partner SMEs and existing main contractors that have evidenced reliable delivery and can demonstrate ongoing value for money through procurement or market testing
- Carry out viability assessments prior to lending being approved for the Wholly Owned Company to demonstrate they meet key targets as outlined in the Business Plan
- Activate redesign where value enhancement can be delivered in consultation with expert advice on market trends
- Explore grant funding opportunities with Housing Associations in the local area to secure nomination rights to properties or directly with Homes England
- Ongoing governance and review by the Housing Development Working Group
- Identify future schemes for development of varying sizes so that they can be tailored to programme resource capacity

Annual Governance Statement Action: 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, covering Council support and signposting to other support including government and local grants, advice about avoiding scams, and support with household costs such as school uniforms.
- 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
- Offer advice to help people with cooking on a budget, including links to Step to Skills to develop learning opportunities
- 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. To include a bid to Round 2.1 of the Government's Social Housing Decarbonation Fund targeting properties with an EPC D rating or below.
- Modelling the impact of energy increases in the charges to tenants and leaseholders to consider how best to support people with managing 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.

Annual Governance Statement Action: Repairs and Maintenance: To reduce the backlog in repairs due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the damage caused by the recent storms the following action is planned:

- Complete the mobilisation of new fencing and guttering programmes and embedding of new Repairs Supervisors who are responsible for ensuring repairs are undertaken in an efficient, timely and effective way.
- Launch of a new online reporting repairs service which will allow customers to select their own repair appointment times
- Appointment to vacant repairs posts to increase the capacity and performance of the Repairs service

Annual Governance Statement Action: Environmental Maintenance Strategy: To ensure that best practice and statutory compliance is achieved in relation to the Environmental Maintenance service the following action is planned:

- Produce an Environmental Maintenance strategy that includes detailed guidance on the dangers of fly-tipping, removal of graffiti and other environmental matters.

Annual Governance Statement Action: Leisure Provision:

- A programme of work will continue to ensure the smooth transition to a new leisure service provider.

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

Annual Governance Statement Action: 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:

- Implementation of service planning in all service areas to improve resource planning
- HR team to continue working with service leadership teams to prioritise recruitment and associated support plans
- Regular review of capacity to deliver FTFC priorities via FTFC Board

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

Annual Governance Statement Action: 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:

- Create a new Target Operating Model for the ICT service (the new structure and roles and governance structure).
- Agree a 3–5-year ICT roadmap
- Network Project - Appoint a Cyber Specialist to assure the end-to-end design of the Council's network, Desktop and VDI environments
- Network Project – Further develop draft Security Policies
- Network Project - Procure replacement firewalls
- Complete the Windows 7 replacement and roll out of M365
- Adopt ITL standards
- Apply for PSN certification once the roll out of Windows 7 and M365 is complete
- Design into the structure a Development and Integration capability
- Fill vacancies in the structure to address single points of failure where only one individual has very specific system knowledge
- Cyber Treatment plan – Back Up upgrade
- Cyber Treatment Plan – Implementation of Security Information and Event Management
- Cyber Treatment Plan – WiFi Technology replacement
- Cyber Treatment Plan – Implement new Network security, Firewall, Switches and Bandwidth
- Cyber Treatment Plan – Replacement of Windows 2008 servers

Annual Governance Statement Action: 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

Annual Governance Statement Action: Social Housings Regulation Bill: To deliver the proposals set out in the Social Housing White Paper which will give tenants greater powers, improve access to swift and fair redress and enhance the powers of the Social Housing Regulator, the following action is planned:

- Development and implementation of a resident/tenant engagement proposal to enable the tenants voice to influence Council policies and decision making and develop a governance structure for this
- Ensure Members and Boards are fully aware of their responsibilities for consumer standard compliance
- Develop and implement a breach self-referral process
- Carry out a gap analysis exercise once new consumer standards are shared
- Implement the required new Tenant Satisfaction Measures which local authorities will be required to report on from April 2023.
- Implement the process for capturing the 12 Tenant Perception measures which local authorities will be required to report on from March 2024.
- Commence a stock condition survey. This will run for the next 5 years.
- Develop and publish a new Communications Plan

Annual Governance Statement Action: Building Management – General Fund Assets: To ensure there is a clear governance structure through a corporate landlord function and ensure compliance of the Council's non-housing property the following action is planned:

- Appointment of a Facilities Manager
- Embedding the new Facilities Management System to integrate operational compliance work within a single system
- Implementation of the Corporate Landlord Function
- Procurement of compliance services, covering Fire, Gas/Water and Electrical contracts

Annual Governance Statement Action: 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:

- Emergency evacuation training for residents of buildings in scope of the Acts
- Inspect and develop a remedial programme of work for buildings in scope
- Carry out fire door inspection programme
- Develop floor and building plans for all housing stock within scope.
- Implementation of a new Fire Risk Assessment Prioritisation Tool
- Develop and install signage in buildings within scope

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

Governance for this principle is currently considered robust and no further governance activity is scheduled at this stage.