

Governance Enhancement Activity to take place in 2024/25

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 2024/25 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
- Scheme of Delegation of Executive decisions to be reviewed
- Workshop for new Members on the Member Code of Conduct
- Anti-bribery Policy to be reviewed
- Review of Financial Regulations and Contract Standing Orders

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.
- Launch of the Council's new Corporate Plan 'Making Stevenage Even Better'
- Review of the Stevenage Together partnership arrangements. This will include a refresh of frequency, membership, value and aims.

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 Corporate Landlord function 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

Annual Governance Statement Action: Balancing the Budget: 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

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

- Procurement arrangements to be updated to reflect new Procurement Act 2023 which is due to come into effect from October 2024.
- Implementation of a new Workforce Strategy

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:

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.

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:

- 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

Annual Governance Statement Action: Socio-economic impacts: As a result of the combined socio-economic impacts of welfare reform and the 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.

Annual Governance Statement Action: Repairs and Voids: To enhance the Repairs and Voids service to following activity 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

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:

- 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

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, and 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

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
- Complete the relevant actions for 2024/25 contained in the Consumer Standards Action Plan
- 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 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 is planned:

- Contractors to carry out remedial work identified as a result of building inspections to be selected 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

Annual Governance Statement Action: 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.

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

- Data protection training to be rolled out to staff
- Data Quality Policy to be updated and approved
- Information Governance Policy to be updated and approved.
- Review of performance measures to align with new Corporate Plan

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.