

Governance enhancement activity undertaken in alignment with the CIPFA Good Governance Framework:

Highlights of governance enhancement activities in 2024/25, either completed or planned, as identified through the ongoing review of principles, are provided below.

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

A

- A light touch targeted Review of the Constitution and the Scheme of Delegation of Executive Decisions is underway, with input from the Association of Democratic Services Officers, though not yet completed.
- Fraud E-Learning training is now part of the Council's online 'Induction and Essentials' training. Anti-Fraud training for Audit Committee took place in September 2024.
- In preparation for the implementation of the new Procurement Act 2023, the Contract Procurement Rules have been reviewed and approved at Full Council in February 2025 and training provided for officers.
- There has been successful recruitment of a new Monitoring Officer, a vital role in supporting the good governance of the organisation.

Principle B Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

B

- Council reports and minutes continue to provide clear evidence of the decisions made and the rationale behind them. Where possible, Council meetings are open to the public and certain meetings are recorded and available to view online.
- The Stevenage Together partnership has been refreshed, with a new terms of reference, which provides details of the role, aims and objectives of the partnership.
- The Resident engagement strategy 24-27 was published in July 2024, to enable the Council to deliver effective engagement and ensure that residents have a range of meaningful opportunities to scrutinise, influence and shape the services that they receive. A resident survey is currently being planned for Spring 2025
- There is evidence of a strong corporate culture that recognises the value of diversity, extending to community engagement and consultation, supported by the Equality and Diversity Governance Group and annual reporting.

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

C

- The new Corporate Plan was launched in April 2024 (Making Stevenage Even Better).
- The service planning process is reviewed and iterated on annually. The service planning process highlights the role that individual services play in delivering the overarching Strategic Plan and the annual performance reporting framework is a key output from the process.
- Carbon reduction annual report has been presented to Cabinet and an extensive online action tracker is now available.

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

D

- The Corporate Plan (Making Stevenage Even Better) ensures that the approach to delivery of the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan is clear, each of the five strategic priorities and cross-cutting themes is presented as a Plan on a Page. Each Plan on a Page is underpinned by Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Milestones that are used to monitor and track performance.
- The internal audit of Risk Management received a 'substantial' assurance opinion.
- There has been successful identification and delivery of financial savings for 2024/25 as well as regular reporting on financial performance and the medium term financial strategy. A revised HRA MTFS has also been presented to Cabinet in November 2024.
- Welfare Reform Group continues to meet every other month.

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

E

- A review of the Shared Revenue and Benefits service has been completed and an action plan is being agreed between the two Councils.
- The Workforce Strategy, titled 'People, Even Better', has been developed to align with the overarching Corporate Plan and identifies the following five key priorities: 1. Ways of working, 2. Attracting and retaining the best people, 3. Engagement and Communication, 4. Inclusion and Wellbeing and 5. Organisational Development. The strategy is a key means of supporting the achievement of the Council's strategic objectives and certain strategic risks

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

F

- Risk management and Corporate Governance have been subject to an annual internal audit and both received positive audit opinions.
- Service Planning for 2025/26 is now underway. The timeline for this is slightly delayed compared to previous years following feedback on the process starting too far from year end previously.
- The General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy was reviewed and approved in September 2024.
- Financial Regulations are under review and Contract Standing Orders revision approved.
- Data Protection e-learning is now live through the Council's digital training portal.
- Anti-fraud and whistleblowing policies are in the process of being updated.

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

G

- A specific Housing Annual Report has been produced and published.
- Actions arising from the audit of the Audit Committee are being implemented spring 2025.
- Prior to LGR the Council was planning for the Council's LGA Peer Review in 2025/26, this is now under review to be discussed with the LGA.