Stevenage Borough Council
Local Code of Corporate Governance

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Stevenage Borough Council
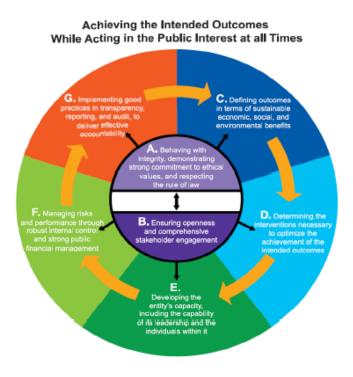# Local Code of Corporate Governance

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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.

Achieving the Intended Outcomes While Acting in the Public Interest at all Times

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 our strategic plan (Making Stevenage Even Better 2024-27), all staff development programmes and in the Appraisal and Personal Development process.

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 regular one to one meetings. The leaders of 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 Procedure Rules
- Financial Regulations
- Corporate Procurement Strategy
- Anti-Bribery Policy
- Fraud Sanctions Policy
- Anti-Money Laundering 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

The Council 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 receive training in accordance with the Act.

Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Partnership Arrangements

The Council has the following key Partnerships:
- Stevenage Together (and its subcommittees: SoSafe Community Safety Partnership, Social Inclusion Partnership, Healthy Stevenage Partnership, Stevenage Works Strategic Partnership)
- 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 Co-operative Neighbourhoods Strategy as well as a Resident Engagement Strategy which provides a clear overview of ways in which the Council engages with residents.

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, Cabinet and Committee meetings, subject to the Access to Information Rules in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution. Cabinet, Council and Overview and Scrutiny meetings continue to be recorded and are available via YouTube which means that members and the public can view meetings at a time convenient to them. Where there is a possibility that business may be considered in private (Part 2), the Monitoring Officer will review the justification and advise on whether there is a legitimate reason to exclude the public.

Decision making practices
Reports are produced on a standard template to prompt officers to take a structured approach to report writing, to help facilitate understanding and ensure they are supported by a 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

Corporate Plan:
The council's Corporate Plan: Making Stevenage Even Better, sets out the Council's vision and the outcomes and objectives the Council aims to achieve over the Plan's lifespan (2024-2027). It guides 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 in-line with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) of the Equality Act (2010).

Alongside those 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 Officer Equality Group (OEG) and 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 in 2020. 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 Corporate Plan 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 adhering to the 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 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 Cabinet and Council.

Capital Programme and Strategy
The Council 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.

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 strategic aims. The Strategy sets out clear financial targets to achieve during the period of the strategy to meet the Council's financial challenges.

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 Cabinet. Assistant Directors receive regular budget monitoring reports and meet regularly with their Finance Business Partners.

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 considers 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 workstreams in place to ensure member and officer capacity and capability. These include:

- A workforce planning process
- An 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 Cabinet 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. 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
Governance arrangements are in place to oversee risks associated with significant programmes and capital schemes. Risks are added to the Operational or Strategic Risk Register where appropriate.

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 the findings inform the Annual Governance Statement.

Performance monitoring
The Council's approach to performance management demonstrates a clear link between service delivery and the strategic objectives in the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan. By aligning performance measures and milestones under the 5 strategic priorities a 'golden thread' linking what the Council delivers, to the fulfilment of its strategic outcomes can be clearly seen. Senior management and Cabinet receive a quarterly corporate performance report. Improvement activity for the measures that are not achieving or forecast not to achieve target are discussed by senior management quarterly prior to Cabinet.

Data Quality
The Council has a Data Quality Policy which outlines the Council's commitment to ensuring data quality and arrangements that 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 Cabinet 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, considers 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 Anti-Bribery, Anti-Money Laundering and 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.

Information governance matters are reported to the Council's Technical Design Authority and Corporate Governance Group. Data protection breaches are reported quarterly to the latter.

The Council has a suite of information governance related policies which are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they are compliant with the regulations and good practice.

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

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.

Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules
Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules are reviewed as required, with any proposed amendments put forward to Council for approval.

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 internal control, including an opinion 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 medium and 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.