

Annual Governance Statement to the 2023/24 Accounts

Good Governance

Good governance is about how the Council ensures that it is doing the right things, in the right way, for the communities it serves, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner.

A Council's Code of Corporate Governance is:

"The system by which local authorities direct and control their functions and relate to their communities"

Our commitment

Canterbury City Council is committed to upholding the highest possible standards of good corporate governance, believing that good governance leads to high standards of management, strong performance, effective use of resources, increased public involvement and trust in the Council and ultimately good outcomes.

The Governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and cultures and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and through which it engages with its residents, businesses, partners and other stakeholders. This Code of Corporate Governance is a public statement that sets out the framework through which the Council meets its commitment to good corporate governance. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate cost-effective services.

This local code of governance has been developed in accordance with and is consistent with the CIPFA/Solace publication "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government framework 2016", which builds on the seven Principles for the Conduct of Individuals in Public Life.

Core principles of good governance

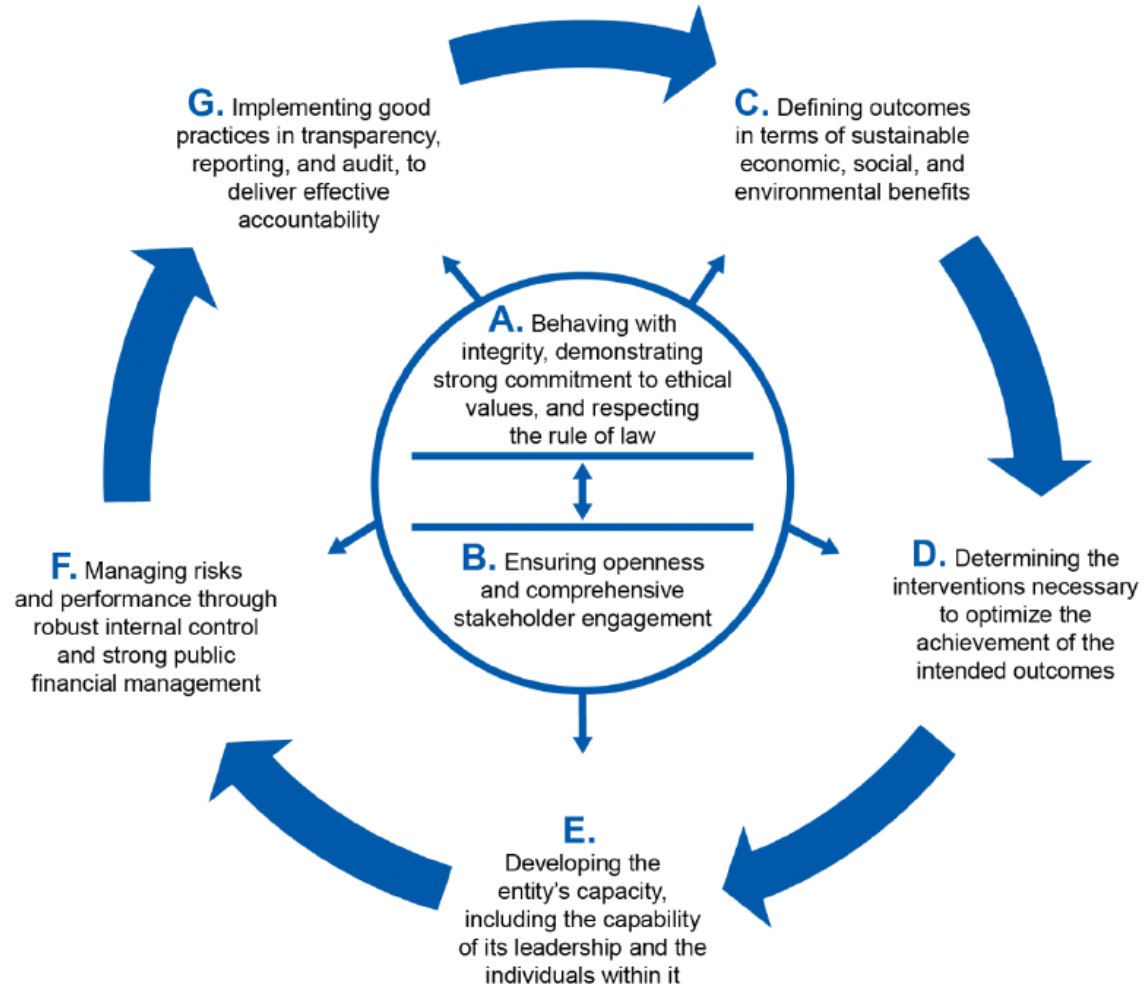
The core governance principles of the council are:-

- A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.
- B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.
- C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.
- D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimize the achievement of the intended outcomes.
- E. Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.
- F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.
- G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit, to deliver effective accountability.

Applying the core principles of good governance

This document describes how the Council achieves the seven principles of good governance and describes how the Council's corporate governance arrangements will be monitored and reviewed.

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



The governance framework

This Code takes each of the principles in turn and sets out the systems, processes and principles the Council has put in place to ensure good corporate governance. The Code will be reviewed annually through the Annual Governance Statement process, which will identify the actions to be taken to enhance the code or address any limitations within it.

A– Behaving with Integrity, with commitment to ethical values, and respect for the law		
Commitment	Procedures	Examples of evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaving with Integrity • Demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values • Respecting the rule of law 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Council expects the authority's political and managerial leadership to create a climate of openness, support and respect and to uphold the Council's values. 2. Standards of conduct and personal behaviour are set out in the Employee Code of Conduct, the Member Code of Conduct (based upon the seven Nolan Principles) and in the Protocol on Councillor/Officer relations. 3. An up to date register of Councillor and senior officer Interests is maintained. 4. The Council has put in place procedures for considering complaints so that members of the public can express dissatisfaction with Council services and their concerns can be monitored and addressed. These complaints are compared by the Ombudsman against other councils in Kent. The Council has separate complaints processes for District and Parish Councillors managed by the Monitoring Officer. 5. The Council has appointed three separate "Independent Persons" to support this, in accordance with the requirements of the Localism Act, 2011 and our Standards Committee. 6. It publishes an annual report of complaints submitted to the Local Government Ombudsman analysing trends in complaints against the Council and what has been done to address them. 7. The Council's Governance Committee is responsible for constitutional issues and ensures that the constitution is monitored and updated when required. 8. The terms of reference of the Standards Committee includes responsibility for advising on the Council's ethical framework and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitution reviewed annually and presented to Committee for approval • Member/Officer Protocol • Member Code of Conduct • Financial Regulations/ • Contract Standard Orders • Register of Interests for Councillors and officers • Register of declarations at meetings • Gifts and Hospitality register • Employee Code of Conduct which is part of the conditions of service included in every employment contract • Complaints procedure • Annual Ombudsman report • Anti-Fraud, Bribery, Corruption and Whistleblowing Policy • Annual Report on the Prevention of Fraud and Corruption • Equalities Policy • Complaints Policy • All Policies are on the councils intranet • Committee Minutes • Policies are reviewed and enforced by a

	<p>the promotion of openness, accountability and probity to ensure the highest standards of conduct.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. The Council maintains an Anti-Fraud, Bribery, Corruption and Whistleblowing Policy to enable confidential reporting of suspected breaches of the Employee Code of Conduct or unethical behaviour. This policy is updated regularly and reviewed by the Audit Committee. Staff attend tri-annual mandatory training on the Policy 10. The Council's standing orders and financial regulations put in place processes designed to ensure that Councillors and employees of the authority are not influenced by prejudice, bias or conflicts of interest in dealing with different stakeholders. They form part of the Council's constitution which is reviewed annually. 11. The Council operates within the legal framework, complying with its statutory duties and making the most of its powers to meet the needs of the district and its residents. 12. The Head of Legal Services is the Council's Monitoring Officer, responsible to the authority for ensuring that agreed procedures are followed and that all applicable statutes and regulations are complied with. 13. The Council ensures that statutory officers have the skills, resources and support necessary to perform effectively in their roles and that these roles are properly understood throughout the Council. 14. The Council has a clear Procurement Process designed to meet the Council's wider objectives and Contract Standing Order Rules designed to deliver robust and fair procurement processes. Independent monitoring of contracts is undertaken to ensure transparency and legal compliance. 15. The Council undertakes Equality Impact Assessments of all major council decisions and takes action to implement changes required, to ensure that council services and policies consider the diverse needs of its service users and citizens. We also host a Disability Advisory Panel who advise council officers on matters of policy, service delivery and design. 	<p>suite of training courses such as Information Security Policy, Access to Information, Equalities and Access Policy</p>
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B – Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Commitment	Procedures	Examples of evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Openness ● Engaging comprehensively with Institutional stakeholders ● Engaging stakeholders effectively, including citizens and service users. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Council holds its meetings and those of its committees in public unless there are good reasons for confidentiality based on the legislation. There is a presumption towards openness and transparency in the publication of reports. 2. There is a calendar of dates for submitting, publishing and distributing committee agendas and this allows members of the public to plan and submit requests to speak at Committee meetings. 3. The council permits public speaking at all of its public meetings, based on the rules set out in the constitution. 4. Other methods of public participation at meetings include submission of petitions and questions at Council. 5. Officers use standard report templates for committee and reports to help ensure that readers are provided with information that is accurate, complete and unbiased. Reports make clear the options available and the reasons for the recommendations so that the implications of all decisions and strategic risks can be assessed before those decisions are made. 6. The Council's consultation programme ensures that the Council proactively seeks the views of a wide range of people on a range of policies and services, engaging with all sections of the community through workshops, surveys, stakeholder events and witness sessions. The Council seeks to ensure all views are actively considered when making decisions, recognising that it is not always possible to reconcile conflicting viewpoints. The Council undertakes regular customer satisfaction surveys of residents to ensure that it has up to date information about their priorities and levels of satisfaction with the Council and its services. 7. The Council run services that are fully digital and allow customers to serve themselves wherever possible. 8. The Council puts resources into community grants for voluntary sector partnerships who are delivering services that complement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Committee agendas & minutes all available on the website ● Constitution ● Public Questions and petitions ● Terms of References of partnership bodies that include council representatives ● Consultation programme ● Petition Scheme ● Council Website ● Annual performance report ● Freedom of Information requests ● District Life Magazine ● Media engagement including social media channels ● Budget Consultation ● Current and previous consultations are accessible on the council's website along with current petitions. ● Residents Survey ● Service based survey analysis ● Collective agreements ● Employment policies and procedures ● Staff and Safety Joint Advisory Committee ● Trade Union Facilities Agreement ● Councillor attendance records on the website ● Published transparency data on the councils website

	<p>the council's objectives.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. The Disability Advisory Panel helps the Council evaluate its success in promoting diversity and meeting a broad range of needs. The council also has a councillor champion for equality and diversity 10. We work with our local Tenant Consultative Group to ensure we deliver the best housing service to our tenants. 11. We work closely with the local business community, including the Canterbury Business Improvement District and the Chambers of Commerce in Herne Bay and Whitstable. 12. The Council sets out in its collective agreements, employment policies and procedures, and terms of reference for forums and meetings involving trade unions, and how it consults with staff and Trade Unions. 13. The council complies with the Freedom of Information Act and publishes expenditure data for our suppliers, councillors and management salaries to provide openness and transparency. 14. The Constitution of the Council includes a comprehensive Communications Protocol detailing a framework that is designed to make all the councils communication effective, targeted and legally sound and providing mediums for effective 2 way communication. 	
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C – Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

Commitment	Procedures	Examples of evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Defining Outcomes ● Sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Corporate Plan sets out the key priorities of the council and how they will be delivered. The main aspirations are to create opportunities for people and businesses to thrive and prosper to encourage future prosperity of the district. 2. The Local Plan sets out the vision and plans for the shape of the District and the Local Development Scheme was adopted September 2024 3. A sustainability appraisal was delivered as part of the Local Plan assessing the effects of programmes on the environment and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Corporate Plan ● Local Plan ● Future study evidence gathering ● Climate Change Impact Assessments ● Climate Change Action Plan ● Air Quality Action Plan ● Annual performance statement ● Budget setting report ● Economic Plans ● Sustainability appraisal ● Green Travel Plan

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Futures study work by Experian setting out the vision and framework for decision making over the next 20 years. 5. The Council has declared a climate change emergency with an objective of being carbon neutral by 2030. 6. The Council actively considers the environmental impact of decisions before those decisions are made. 7. A Climate Change Action Plan (approved for consultation) sets out how the council will deliver on its climate change objectives. 8. It reviews those objectives each year, through the Annual Statement agreed at the Annual Council meeting and the Corporate Plan. 9. The council has produced a Modern Slavery Statement which has been approved at full Council and is promoted to all our suppliers. 10. The council is committed to following the Living Wage as the minimum. The lowest payscale reflects this to ensure staff receive a wage that meets everyday needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Modern Slavery Statement ● Pay Policy
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D – Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes		
Commitment	Procedures	Examples of evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Determining Interventions ● Planning Interventions ● Optimising achievement of intended outcomes 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The council has a Medium Term Financial Strategy to resource its aspirations and assess and plan for any financial risks. The strategy is reviewed annually. 2. The Corporate Plan expresses the strategic objectives for the Council. 3. The annual report enables councillors and services to measure performance against targets and assist in decisions about where resources should be focused. 4. Services prepare operational plans indicating how they will meet objectives set in the Corporate Plan and setting out their priorities and work programmes for the year ahead. Performance against objectives is measured against key performance indicators and regularly reviewed by senior management. 5. There are arrangements in place for regular budget monitoring and the reporting of significant variances to senior management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Budget report/Medium Term Financial Strategy ● Corporate Plan ● Annual performance report to Council ● Operational Plans ● Budget monitoring reports ● Performance reports ● Key performance indicators ● Standard committee reports ● Capital Strategy ● Investment Strategy ● Treasury Management Strategy ● Audit reporting quarterly to Audit Committee ● Committee Minutes

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. The Capital Strategy report identifies how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management actively contribute to the provision of the corporate objectives and is reported to Audit Committee for monitoring. 7. The Council works to maximise its resources by delivering services as efficiently as possible, working in partnership with others and using other providers where these are the best options. 8. Periodic internal audit reviews consider the effectiveness of controls and efficiency of processes 9. The council engages expertise from outside the authority when it does not have the necessary capacity or skills in-house. 10. A standard format report for decision making is used to ensure decision makers receive objective and rigorous analysis of a variety of options indicating how intended outcomes would be achieved. 	
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E – Developing the entity’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it		
Commitment	Procedures	Examples of evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developing the Council's capacity ● Developing the capability of the entity’s leadership and other individuals 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Council sets out a clear statement of the roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers in its Constitution. The scheme of delegation within the Constitution makes clear what matters are reserved for collective decision-making by Cabinet or committees. 2. A Protocol on councillor/officer relations is used to aid effective communication between councillors and officers and to clarify their respective roles and appropriate ways of working. 3. The Council’s Head of Paid Service is responsible and accountable to the authority for its operational management. 4. When working in partnerships, the council ensures that councillors are clear about their roles and responsibilities, both individually and collectively, in relation to the partnerships and to the Council. 5. The behaviours expected of employees are clearly defined under the following headings: Customer Focus, Creativity, Adapt, Lead and Motivate, Empower and take responsibility, Work together and be supportive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Constitution ● Transformation programme ● Record of training activity ● Behaviours framework ● Grievance and disciplinary procedures ● Councillor induction and briefing programme ● Staff induction programme ● Training opportunities ● Partnership working e.g East Kent Audit Partnership ● Apprenticeship Levy opportunities ● Elearning modules ● Job descriptions ● Job evaluation process ● HR Policies ● Training Plan ● Training calendar

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. All employees joining the Council are offered an induction programme and regular reviews with their manager. 7. All councillors are provided with an induction programme and regular briefing and training offers to meet their needs. Attendance is recorded. 8. Councillor training is mandatory in order to sit on Planning, Licensing and Audit Committees. All councillors receive Code of Conduct awareness training. 9. Identifying where partnership working can achieve added value is carried out via service reviews and benchmarking against other local authorities and commercial organisations to improve the use of resources and provide further opportunities for staff to progress their career. 10. Investment in training, Apprenticeship Levy opportunities and an ELearning programme are utilised to develop staff at all levels. 11. The Transformation process is identifying skills gaps. Job descriptions are being updated to develop and maintain an effective workforce. HR Policies are also updated to give clear guidance to managers and staff and to maintain the health and wellbeing of the workforce. 12. A training plan is reviewed and agreed annually by Management team that identifies areas where training will be required during the year. This is informed by the corporate objectives, direction and projects identified for that year and the skills that are required to successfully deliver those outcomes. 	
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F – Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management		
Commitment	Procedures	Examples of evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Managing Risk ● Managing Performance ● Robust Internal Control ● Managing data ● Strong public financial management 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Council has a Risk Management Policy, supplemented by procedures and guidance. 2. The council ensures that risk management is embedded into the culture of the authority; with managers at all levels recognising that risk management is part of their job. 3. The council undertakes risk assessments in all areas of activity where it is necessary to do so, including those covered by Health and Safety legislation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Risk Management Policy and procedures ● Data Protection Policy and Information Security framework ● Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 – Guidance ● Compliance with the CIPFA Role of the S151 Officer in Local Government

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. A corporate risk register is reported to the Audit Committee on a quarterly basis detailing the council's strategic risks and mitigation. 5. The Council respects the personal data it holds and will comply with the data protection principles in all of its business activities. 6. The Council respects the privacy of members of the public when carrying out investigations and ensures that privacy is only interfered with when the law permits and there is clear public interest justification. 7. The Council's Service Director Finance and Procurement is the Chief Financial Officer and S151 Officer and is responsible for ensuring the lawfulness and financial prudence of decision making. They are responsible for the financial affairs of the council and ensuring that appropriate advice is given on all financial matters. 8. Finance Officers support both long term achievement of outcomes, transformational change and short term operational performance by identifying risks and working with Budget Holders to secure good stewardship. Quarterly budget monitoring is carried out and reported to Management Team, with biannual budget monitoring and outturn reports being reported to Cabinet and Full Council. 9. Audit reviews provide a level of assurance on the adequacy of internal controls and of risks to the councils function/systems including ensuring full compliance with relevant laws, internal policies and procedures. 10. Audit reporting independently to Audit Committee quarterly 11. Audit reporting on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the framework of governance, risk management and robust controls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Internal audit plan ● Annual review by external financial auditors ● Member/Officer Protocol ● Constitution ● Financial Regulations and Contract Standing Orders ● Quarterly budget monitoring ● Management Team minutes ● Annual Internal Audit report ● Audit Committee Minutes ● Annual Governance Statement
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G – Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability		
Commitment	Procedures	Examples of evidence

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implementing good practice in transparency ● Implementing good practices in reporting ● Assurance and effective accountability 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Council makes sure members of the public have access to information about the workings of the Council. It makes clear what information is routinely published through its website and publication scheme and responds promptly to requests for information. 2. Shared services arrangements with other local authorities or partners document their governance arrangements, which are clear, open and accountable. Business plans and performance is reported to shared service boards and relevant scrutiny committees. 3. The Council maintains an independent Internal Audit function, with a risk-based annual plan, designed to test regularly that the Council's policies and processes operate in practice and that the Council complies with legislation and good practice. 4. The Head of Internal Audit produces an annual opinion on the Council's internal control environment and the risk management framework to meet the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. 5. The Head of Internal Audit Opinion is used to inform an Annual Governance Statement, which is signed by the Head of Paid Service and Leader of the Council, and approved by the Audit Committee. 6. The Council also agrees an annual work plan with its External Auditors to test the Council's response to major legislation and the soundness of its financial and governance processes. 7. Recommendations arising from internal and external audit and inspection processes are used to inform future decision-making. 8. Internal Audit function is an independent appraisal process whose staff have direct access to Councillors. 9. All audit findings are reported to Audit Committee quarterly including follow up reports to assess implementation of recommendations and improvements to control systems. 10. The Council uses an Independent Remuneration Panel to give advice on payments for Members and considers their advice when setting the Members' Allowance Scheme. 11. The Panel operates in an open and transparent manner, making their agendas, reports and minutes available to the public. 12. The Members' Allowance Scheme is also made available to the public and on the Council's website. The scheme is reviewed every four years, with increases in allowances aligned to staff pay awards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Council website ● Audit Committee Terms of Reference ● Publication scheme ● Freedom of Information requests ● Monitoring reports to Audit Committee ● Annual Governance Statement ● Shared service collaboration agreements ● Strategic Risk Register ● Annual External Audit letter ● Internal Audit programme ● Councillor remuneration reports ● Internal Audit reports ● Audit Committee Minutes ● Transparency data on website
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	<p>13. The Annual Governance Statement detailing the robust arrangements in place for assessing overall governance of the council.</p> <p>14. Transparency data updated annually and published on the councils website. This includes Officers enrolments over £50k and Trade Union time.</p>	
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Monitoring and reporting

The Council will undertake an annual review of its corporate governance arrangements to ensure continuing compliance with best practice to provide assurance that they are adequate and operating effectively in practice. Where reviews of the corporate governance arrangements have revealed gaps, actions will be planned to enhance the governance arrangements accordingly.

The Council will prepare an Annual Governance Statement which will be submitted to the Audit Committee for consideration and will form part of the Council's annual Statement of Accounts.

The Governance Statement will include:

- an acknowledgement of responsibility for ensuring there is a sound system of governance (incorporating the system of internal control) and reference to the authority's code of governance;
- a reference to and assessment of the effectiveness of key elements of the governance framework and the role of those responsible for the development and maintenance of the governance environment;
- an opinion on the level of assurance that the governance arrangements can provide and that the arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework;
- a reference to how issues raised in the previous year's annual governance statement have been resolved; and
- a conclusion including a commitment to monitoring implementation as part of the next annual review.

The Annual Governance Statement will be signed by the Leader of the Council and the Head of Paid Service on behalf of the Council

Review of effectiveness

The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the executive managers within the authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Head of East Kent Audit Partnership's annual report, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

The process that has been applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework are given in the table below:

DESCRIPTION OF KEY ELEMENTS	ROLE	REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS
1. The Authority	<p>The Authority's objectives from 2024 to 2028 are set out in its Corporate Plan.</p> <p>These are based on 4 main priorities headed Greener, Fairer, Better, Stronger.</p> <p>Greener - delivering on the council's climate change and biodiversity emergencies</p> <p>Fairer- use the information we have to target our services at those most in need of support</p> <p>Better - delivering more social houses back into our housing stock, making developers deliver more affordable housing across the district, using our planning system to deliver more first homes for local residents, and ensuring those homes are of good quality and low impact on our environment</p> <p>Stronger - effective in what we do, efficient in the ways we deliver and trustworthy in the ways we consider and make decisions</p>	<p>A wide range of control and reporting mechanisms are in place to monitor performance against the Corporate Plan and Community Strategy.</p> <p>These include both internal and external mechanisms such as:</p> <p>the Audit and Governance Role</p> <p>Risk Management</p> <p>Budget Monitoring & Control</p> <p>Performance Management and monitoring</p> <p>Procedures set out in the Council's Constitution</p> <p>External Resident / Public consultation and Satisfaction Surveys.</p>
2. The Council Committee Structure	<p>In May 2022, the council changed governance arrangements, moving away from the committee model back to the leader and cabinet model.</p> <p>The Cabinet is made up of the Leader, who is elected by the Council, and a small number of Cabinet Members appointed by the Leader. Each Cabinet Member is designated a portfolio of responsibilities by the Leader.</p>	<p>Full Council retains responsibility for non-executive functions such planning and licensing. Planning Committee determine the most significant applications and those called in by ward councillors.</p> <p>The Licensing Sub-Committee meets regularly, primarily to determine premises license applications where objections have been received.</p>

	<p>The Cabinet is responsible for providing political leadership to the council. They determine policies within the envelope of the policy framework and recommend the budget to Full Council.</p> <p>Robust Scrutiny arrangements are in place to support the governance model. The Overview Committee provides pre-decision scrutiny of significant items prior to Cabinet. Public speakers are encouraged to speak at this committee to maximise input prior to decisions being made.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Committee reviews performance and has the power to ‘call-in’ cabinet decisions. There was one call-in during 2023/24 for the Sturry park and ride.</p> <p>The Whitstable Harbour Board makes strategic decisions regarding the Harbour land, property and marine safety.</p>	<p>Full Council elected to set up a number of other committees to perform specific functions, including Audit, Standards, General Purposes and Appointments Committees.</p> <p>A number of partnership committees are in place, including the Joint Transportation Board, East Kent Services Committee and the South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership.</p> <p>Details of the responsibilities assigned to each committee can be found in Terms of Reference in the Council’s Constitution, alongside the delegations from Full Council to Officers.</p> <p>Working Groups have been retained within the current arrangements to undertake in-depth reviews. Each working group comprises a cross-party group of councillors supported by officers who are tasked with reviewing specific issues. Details of the review topics undertaken this year can be found in this report under Number 6 for Assurance Mechanisms .</p>
<p>3. The Audit Committee</p>	<p>The Audit Committee’s role is split into 3 areas:</p> <p>Audit – overseeing and reviewing the results of internal and external audit activity;</p> <p>Regularity – overseeing and reviewing procedures relating to contract procedures, financial regulations, codes of conduct, anti-fraud & corruption and whistle-blowing arrangements, risk management and complaints;</p> <p>Accounts – reviewing the annual accounts and considering whether there are any matters of concern to raise.</p> <p>There is also a Governance Committee to monitor the workings of the Council’s constitution and recommend changes.</p>	<p>The Audit Committee approved the 2023/24 Audit Plan in March 2023 setting out the programme of work for reviewing and monitoring the activities of the Council, in particular its internal financial controls.</p> <p>An annual report providing a summary of the audit work carried out in 2023/24 was presented at the July 2024 Committee meeting. The majority of reviews had been given a substantial or reasonable assurance and there were no major areas of concern that would give rise to a qualified opinion. A comparison of the risk statistics from other local authorities in the East Kent Audit Partnership was presented at the September Coommittee meeting.</p>

		<p>Quarterly reports of the Strategic Risk Register are made to this committee after they have been updated by Senior Managers and Directors.</p> <p>The Audit Committee approved the draft annual accounts at the March 2024 meeting. The final accounts were formerly approved in March 2024.</p>
DESCRIPTION OF KEY ELEMENTS	ROLE	REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS
<p>4. Complaint Handling under the Localism Act</p>	<p>Under the Localism Act 2011, arrangements have been adopted for dealing with complaints of misconduct by councillors.</p>	<p>The council along with many others, has adopted the Kent-wide code of conduct for councillors and a standardised procedure for handling a complaint as agreed by the Kent Secretaries.</p> <p>This has been reviewed during 2022 and proposed amendments have been presented to the Standards Committee and Governance Committee with a recommendation that Council accept the proposed changes to the Member's Code of Conduct and the Arrangements for dealing with Councillor Conduct complaints. Council considered the same on 22 February 2023.</p> <p>During 2023/24 to date there were 7 complaints received regarding the conduct of Councillors and 3 against Parish Councillors and all concluded within the financial year with none outstanding to carry forward to 2024/2. All were resolved informally and no cases proceeded to an investigation.</p>

DESCRIPTION OF KEY ELEMENTS	ROLE	REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS
<p>5. Internal Audit</p>	<p>The role of Internal Audit is “To give an independent opinion on the adequacy, effectiveness and operation of controls within the Authority’s systems”.</p> <p>Internal Auditors have direct access to the Chair of the Audit Committee if required. They provide a regular update to the Committee at each of the quarterly meetings and attend any special meetings that may be convened during the year.</p>	<p>The council has very high levels of assurance in respect of all of its main financial systems and the majority of its governance arrangements</p> <p>The overall opinion of the System of Internal Controls in operation throughout 2023/24 based on the work of the East Kent Audit Partnership is presented in their annual report to the Governance and Audit Committee in July.</p> <p>As at 31 January 2024 the Internal Auditors had completed 172 days of review equating to 62% (against the target at that time of 75%) of planned days completion.</p> <p>A regular schedule of follow up audits are undertaken to ensure management have implemented the action plans arising from each audit. Members can see full details within the Internal Audit Annual Report 2023/24 which was be presented to the Audit Committee in July 2024</p> <p>The East Kent Audit Partnership have considered the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and an external review was commissioned. In July 2024 an external quality assessment of Internal Audit was presented to Audit Committee detailing current services are assessed to Generaly Conforms with PSIAS standards, this is the highest rating available.</p> <p>As part of EKAP’s quality monitoring arrangements a satisfaction questionnaire is completed by the managers of the service after every audit enabling the officers involved to comment on the conduct and outcome of the audit. This information is used to monitor quality and inform self assessment for continuous improvement.</p>

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DESCRIPTION OF KEY ELEMENTS	ROLE	REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS
<p>6. Other reviews / Assurance Mechanism</p>	<p>The Performance Board, comprising The Head of Paid Service, relevant Director and representatives from Finance and Commissioned Services meets with each Director and each Head of Service to review their Service Specification and Operating Plan, which includes agreed KPI's and the latest financial monitoring statement.</p> <p>The Corporate Plan key Performance Indicators for 2021-24 were agreed by the Policy Committee on 20 April 2022.</p> <p>The Audit Committee receives the annual assurance report from our external auditors (Grant Thornton).</p> <p>Councillor Working Groups undertake regular reviews of particular service areas. The programme is overseen by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p>	<p>Performance updates on housing performance, corporate performance and contract performance were submitted to the Scrutiny Sub-Committee and Cabinet in November 2023.</p> <p>The following Councillor led Task and Finish Working Groups were in place during 2023/24:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seaside Byelaws working group • South Quay and harbour working group • Public Conveniences Review • Biodiversity working group • Waste, recycling and litter working group • Planning enforcement working group <p>A review of working groups and topics was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2023</p>

Significant Governance Issues

The council identifies and monitors significant governance issues through its Strategic Risk Register.

How the council identifies and assesses its corporate risks and how the Risk Register and the Annual Governance Statement are set out is detailed in the council's **Local Code of Governance** and **Risk Management Policy**, available on the council website.

The risk register is updated on an ongoing basis from the following sources: -

- Risks identified by individual officers during the course of their work,
- Risks identified from both internal and external audit reports.
- Risks identified in the course of the performance review processes.
- Risks identified from assessments carried out in other council reports notably Project Scope and Project Brief documents.
- Risks identified during the course of the Risk Register review process, notably by Senior Managers, Directors, Management Team and Councillors at Audit and Governance Committees.
- Risks identified at Management Team and Departmental Team meetings.

The risk register is monitored and reviewed quarterly by the following: -

- Directors and Service Heads
- Management Team
- Audit Committee

The Strategic Risk Register is a public document updated and published quarterly in the agenda of the Audit Committee. Significant governance issues are identified on the risk register together with the steps the council is taking to either control or mitigate these risks including reference to other action plans and reports where appropriate. The highest risk score that can be given to a significant issue is 25 (5 for impact and 5 for likelihood). The council had a total of 25 risks on the strategic risk register at 31st March 2024, scores ranging from 25 down to 3.

The highest risk scores were concerned with:

- Balancing the Budget
- Cyber Incident
- Housing Assets – Maintenance and Compliance
- Waste Collection, Street cleansing, grounds maintenance, public convenience cleansing and building cleaning contracts.

During 2023/24 there were a number of national and international events that continued to have a huge impact on the work the council undertakes and these events have also increased the financial burden. The Ukrainian and the Afghanistan refugees support meant that staff resource has continued to be diverted to support these communities.

The legacy of the restrictions during the Covid pandemic and the subsequent struggle for the business community to grow their businesses back to pre-covid levels has led to the closure of a number of businesses in the district. This has impacted on the councils ability to achieve the expected rental income. The unexpected fuel shortages and the current cost of living crisis has all resulted in increased spend on supplies and the extra financial burden on our residents has impacted on greater use of all the services the council provides to support the community.

Throughout the uncertain year the council has continued to move forward to continually improve the services provided to local business and residential community. The contract and excellent relationship the council has with Canenco continues to strengthen the services for waste collection and street cleansing and by focussing on digital progression the customer now has easier access to services and information in a number of areas.

Several large projects have been completed. The Riverside development is almost complete with multiple units let, and the relocation of the council offices project is now fully underway.

During the 2023/24 financial year the council continued with the transformation process to improve the digital platform for customers and staff, and realigning the councils organisational structure to support improved customer services. This has been a major project for the council which has required commitment and input from all staff alongside their everyday work. All staff are now in place in their new roles.

Some of the major planned projects for 2024/25 are a joint latco set up for Revenues and Benefits. Added to this are the Levelling Up Funded projects to enhance the district and provide more community spaces.

Management realise that there is a huge amount of work to do to set future balanced budgets, to improve the quality of our housing stock and to provide quality social housing for our residents. Therefore the highest scoring risks during the first part of the 2024/25 financial year are likely to remain as:

- Balancing the Budget
- Housing Assets – Maintenance and Compliance
- Housing Demand

The Strategic Risk Register will continue to be monitored, updated and reported to Audit Committee.

Throughout yet another very challenging financial year the robust controls in 2023/24 remained relevant and have been effective.

Conclusion and Corporate Governance Opinion

Taking account of the controls and actions taken listed above we are confident that we have satisfactory governance arrangements in place and the financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA framework for Delivering Good Governance and the statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government.

The Audit committee has advised us on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework. The actions listed in the strategic risk register are aimed at addressing risks and ensuring continuous improvement of the governance systems in place.

We continue to monitor these actions to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these address the improvements identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Signed:
Leader

Signed:
Head of Paid Service on behalf of Canterbury City Council