

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Core Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law		
Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<b>A1:</b> <i>Behaving with integrity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring members and officers behave with integrity and lead a culture where acting in the public interest is visibly and consistently demonstrated thereby protecting the reputation of the organisation.</li> <li>Ensuring members take the lead in establishing specific standard operating principles or values for the organisation and its staff and that they are communicated and understood. These should build on the Seven Principles of Public Life (the <i>Nolan Principles</i>).</li> <li>Leading by example and using the above standard operating principles or values as a framework for decision making and other actions.</li> <li>Demonstrating, communicating and embedding the standard operating principles or values through appropriate policies and processes which are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they are operating effectively.</li> </ul>	<p>A Code of Conduct for Employees is in place and is communicated to all officers as part of the authority's <i>New Starter</i> process on commencement of their role, with Managers ensuring those without system access are aware of and have signed up to all relevant policies of the council.</p> <p>The council has a Standards Committee in place, which includes an appointed Independent Person. The committee is underpinned by an adopted Member Code of Conduct which is regularly reviewed and establishes expected standards of Member behaviour. In view of these standards, the council's website provides details of the procedure involved for any persons with a <a href="#">complaint regarding a Councillor</a>. As with the Constitution's <a href="#">Procedure for dealing with Member Conduct Complaints</a>, the website provides up-to-date contact details for the Council's Monitoring Officer.</p> <p>The Corporate Customer Service Charter establishes standards expected of officers, with our website hosting specific details of the <a href="#">Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure</a> alongside details of the Local Government Ombudsman, with feedback used to share improvement and good practice across departments. The Local Government Ombudsman's annual report was considered by the <a href="#">Finance and Audit Committee</a> in 2023-24, with an identified total of 12 complaints or enquiries raised about council services, and two ultimately upheld. In terms of monitoring, complaints data is reported to the Cabinet and also as part of a broader contextual report for the Leader's Portfolio, which also includes details of corporate complements (see A2).</p> <p><b>POTENTIAL ACTION:</b> Through the provisions of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, in 2023-24 the Housing Ombudsman introduced a new statutory Complaint Handling Code for landlords, with the Ombudsman itself statutorily required to monitor levels of compliance. The duty is specifically timed to align with the additional new requirement of the publication and submission of Tenant Satisfaction Measures outcomes. As such, as a social housing landlord, the undertaking of a self-assessment against the code, and the publication of the results of the exercise will form an AGS recommendation for the council in 2024-25.</p> <p>The council's Register of Interests applies to both officers and Members and requires that declarations must be made for any item in which they may have, or may be perceived to have, an interest that may influence their decision making ability. Any Disclosure of Pecuniary Interests by Members are reviewed and countersigned by the council's Monitoring Officer. The council also has in place a Gifts and Hospitality register which is periodically promoted to remind officers and Members of the disclosure requirements.</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
		<p>To oversee a transparent and robust Members' Allowances Scheme, the authority has an appointed Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP). In December 2023, the IRP provided a series of scheme recommendations to <a href="#">Council</a> which were unanimously adopted.</p> <p>To provide an effective framework for counter fraud and anti-corruption arrangements, the council has an established <a href="#">Counter Fraud and Corruption Strategy</a>. Working alongside the council's <a href="#">Anti-Money Laundering Policy</a> and <a href="#">Whistleblowing Policy</a>, these are collectively designed to develop an effective working environment that supports its zero- tolerance approach towards fraud, bribery, and corrupt activity. Each are published to the website.</p>
<p><b>A2:</b> <i>Demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeking to establish, monitor and maintain the organisation's ethical standards and performance.</li> <li>• Underpinning personal behaviour with ethical values and ensuring they permeate all aspects of the organisation's operational culture and operation.</li> <li>• Developing and maintaining robust policies and procedures which place emphasis on agreed ethical values.</li> <li>• Ensuring that external providers of services on behalf of the organisation are required to act with integrity and in compliance with ethical standards expected by the organisation.</li> </ul>	<p>Throughout 2023-24 committee reports have been drafted and decisions made with explicit consideration of professional advice relating to; financial implications, delivery of the Corporate Plan objectives and, equally, a series of ethical considerations; legal and data protection implications, climate change, Section 17 of the Crime &amp; Disorder Act, Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 and Section 43 of the Care Act 2014 (Safeguarding) and Equality Act 2010 provisions.</p> <p><b>COMPLETED ACTION:</b> Specifically designed to coincide with the 2023 local elections, a comprehensive Member induction training programme was delivered in 2023-24, including a dedicated session on the Code of Conduct and declaration of interest and confidentiality (see E2). In January 2024, <a href="#">Cabinet</a> agreed a new Member training programme for 2024-25, including Communication and Social Media training aimed at identifying the appropriate ethical values and behaviour expected of Councillors in delivering their elected responsibilities.</p> <p>At an officer level, the council has built the requirement for the promotion of ethical standards into its performance and retention processes. The council's recruitment policy and job description material make clear the importance of adhering to expected ethical standards. Equally, the appraisal process sets out a requirement for managers to evidence their compliance with the equality agenda, further embedding this within the culture of the authority.</p> <p>The council has an effective <a href="#">Corporate Procurement Strategy</a> acting as the foundation on which the authority's approach to procurement is based. Related to this, the contract process terms and conditions emphasise the requirement for providers to deliver contracted services on behalf of the council in line with ethical standards as determined by legislation. In addition, the Constitution presents Contract Procedure Rules, which include provision for competition and regulate the manner in which procurement and tendering take place within the council.</p> <p>The council has in place a robust <a href="#">Working in Partnership Framework</a> which is the central point of reference in developing new partnerships, linking the formation of new partnership working opportunities to the delivery of the council's Corporate Plan objectives.</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
		<p>Specifically, the framework outlines a procedure for managing partnerships and includes a pledge in 'Maintaining Ethical Standards'. This sets out expectations of Members, officers, and partners in terms of working in partnership and specifically a commitment to <i>"maintaining high ethical standards in the conduct of the partnership's business, including the promotion of equality and respect for all sections of the community"</i>.</p> <p>Following a review, a revised Framework was agreed by <a href="#">Council</a> in April 2024 and adopted into the authority's constituted Policy Framework (see B2).</p>
<p><b>A3:</b> <i>Respecting the rule of law</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring members and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the rule of the law as well as adhering to relevant laws and regulations.</li> <li>Creating the conditions to ensure that the statutory officers, other key post holders, and members, are able to fulfil their responsibilities in accordance with legislative and regulatory requirements.</li> </ul>	<p>The council's <a href="#">Constitution</a> sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Executive and all elected Members. The Constitution is periodically reviewed, updated, and re-issued to ensure that it remains up to date and reflective of the council's governance structure.</p> <p>Forming part of a three-phased strategic review, in 2023-24 revisions to the Constitution included Annex 1: Responsibility for Functions, aimed at ensuring an accurate reflection of the council's governance arrangements. The revised annex was ultimately agreed by <a href="#">Council</a>. The Constitution's scheme of delegation (Annex 1) was also considered and subsequently re-affirmed at Annual Council in May 2023 (see E2).</p> <p>Specifically, Annex 1 (Section 1.12 – Proper Officers &amp; Section 1.13 - Functions delegated to officers of the council) sets out the responsibilities of the following in 2023-24:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Chief Executive:</b> a full-time appointment who is also the Head of Paid Service. The Chief Executive Officer has completed a specific assurance statement to demonstrate how their role has been executed effectively during 2023-24.</li> <li><b>Section 151 Officer:</b> the Section 151 officer is the Director (Corporate Services) and the Deputy Section 151 Officer is the Assistant Director (Corporate Services). The Section 151 Officer has completed a specific 'Chief Financial Officer' assurance statement which sets out how the council has complied with the <a href="#">CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government</a> in 2023-24, as well as how the council has met its Section 151 obligations as outlined within the Constitution.</li> <li><b>Monitoring Officer:</b> The Monitoring Officer has completed a specific assurance statement to demonstrate how their role has properly been discharged during 2023-24. The role is undertaken by the Chief Legal Officer for Medway Council under the terms of the shared Legal Service between the authorities.</li> </ul>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>A3:</b> <i>Respecting the rule of law</i> <i>[cont.]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Striving to optimise the use of the full powers available for the benefit of citizens, communities and other stakeholders.</li> <li>• Dealing with breaches of legal and regulatory provisions effectively.</li> <li>• Ensuring corruption and misuse of power are dealt with effectively.</li> </ul>	<p>The Chief Executive, and the Section 151 officer are permanent members of the council's Management Team, with the role of Monitoring Officer at Management Team principally undertaken by the Deputy Monitoring Officer in 2023-24. Through these positions they are able to provide effective and appropriate financial and legal advice, in line with statutory requirements, in all decisions taken by the authority.</p> <p><b>COMPLETED ACTION:</b> Central to the governance control environment, the Constitution ensures effective leadership throughout the authority, outlining the core executive and non-executive functions and the legal roles and responsibilities of the council. In order to ensure it remains up to date in regard to legal expectations and accurately reflective of the council's governance structure, a full review of the Constitution was undertaken in 2023-24. Recommendations were presented to Council in a three-phased approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Phase 1: Articles, Summary and Explanation;</li> <li>Phase 2: Annex 2 - Procedural Rules &amp; Annex 3 - Codes of Practice and Protocols of the Constitution; and</li> <li>Phase 3: Annex 1 Responsibility of Functions &amp; Live Streaming.</li> </ul> <p>Complimenting constituted arrangements, the council's transparency webpages include specific information relating to the council's <a href="#">Corporate Management Team</a> (CMT). Published in line with the expectations of the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, the information presents a clear outline of the roles and responsibilities of the council's Chief Executive, Directors, and Heads of Service, supported by information relating to salary provision (see B1).</p> <p>To provide a framework to the reporting and response involved in dealing with a misuse of power, the council has an established <a href="#">Counter Fraud and Corruption Strategy</a> for the authority. Working alongside the council's <a href="#">Anti-Money Laundering Policy</a> and <a href="#">Whistleblowing Policy</a>, the documents are collectively designed to develop an effective working environment that supports a zero-tolerance approach towards fraud, bribery, and corrupt activity. To communicate the council's commitment, all three documents are published to the website.</p> <p>In 2023-24, following a series of recent interventions in the sector, guidance was issued by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to address cultural and governance failings in local authorities. In seeking to understand its compliance in this area, the council undertook a self-assessment using the presented DLUHC framework, which includes many of the ethical and legal considerations of this CIPFA/SOLACE review document. Reported to Cabinet in full, results of the assessment, including potential follow-on activity, are therefore identified throughout this review document (see E2: <i>Developing the capability of the entity's leadership and other individuals</i> and F2: <i>Managing performance</i>).</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

<b>Core Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement</b>		
<b>Standard</b>	<b>Method of compliance</b>	<b>Evidence of compliance</b>
<b>B1: Openness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring an open culture through demonstrating, documenting and communicating the organisation's commitment to openness.</li> <li>Making decisions that are open about actions, plans, resource use, forecasts, outputs and outcomes. The presumption is for openness. If that is not the case, a justification for the reasoning for keeping a decision confidential should be provided.</li> <li>Providing clear reasoning and evidence for decisions in both public records and explanations to stakeholders and being explicit about the criteria, rationale and considerations used. In due course, ensuring that the impact and consequences of those decisions are clear.</li> <li>Using formal and informal consultation and engagement to determine the most appropriate and effective interventions/ courses of action.</li> </ul>	<p>The council's <a href="#">website</a> forms a key tool in delivering the authority's commitment to openness and transparency in how it conducts its business. The website is set out in a clear and easily accessible way, using infographics and plain language. Information residents use most, such as Council Tax, and Waste and Recycling can be accessed quickly and easily from the main page.</p> <p>To effectively communicate the council's ambition and principles, the <a href="#">Corporate Plan</a> is made available via the council's website. On a quarterly basis formal reports are presented to the appropriate Cabinet Committee enabling scrutiny in the performance of the council's key frontline services, supported by publications of key activities and <a href="#">performance</a> via <i>Your Borough</i>. Completing the reporting cycle, the council also reports year-end outturns for the Performance Management Framework (PMF) in its <a href="#">Annual Performance Report</a>.</p> <p>In addition, the council continues to be committed to the government's transparency agenda. A specific section of the <a href="#">council's website</a> has been created in order to enable the publication of a number of key data sets and formal reports including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senior Staff Salaries &amp; Organisation chart;</li> <li>Fees, charges and contracts data;</li> <li>Civic Budget Book and Financial Statements; and</li> <li>Member Allowances.</li> </ul> <p>The council's <a href="#">Constitution</a> sets out the rules and protocols associated with decision making at an executive level, including those classified as 'key decisions'. In preparing reports for a decision, all have been drafted with explicit consideration of professional advice relating to; financial implications, delivery of the Corporate Plan objectives and, equally, a series of ethical considerations; legal impact, data protection, Section 17 of the Crime &amp; Disorder Act, Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 and Section 43 of the Care Act 2014 (Safeguarding) and Equality Act 2010 provisions. All decisions are captured within the minutes of a committee meeting and are published alongside any <i>key decisions</i>, to the <a href="#">Committee</a> section of the website.</p> <p>Constitutionally, where decisions are based on reports presenting confidential information the public are excluded from proceedings. However, in its commitment to openness and transparency in its decision making, wherever possible the council seeks to overcome this restriction by developing 'Part A' agenda reports (i.e. accessible to all) that provide the background context, criteria and rationale to the confidential 'Part B' (confidential) agenda item.</p>



## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p><b>B2:</b> <i>Engaging comprehensively with institutional stakeholders</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effectively engaging with institutional stakeholders to ensure that the purpose, objectives and intended outcomes for each stakeholder relationship are clear so that outcomes are achieved successfully and sustainably.</li> <li>• Developing formal and informal partnerships to allow for resources to be used more efficiently and outcomes achieved more effectively.</li> <li>• Ensuring that partnerships are based on:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Trust;</li> <li>○ a shared commitment to change;</li> <li>○ a culture that promotes and accepts challenge among partners; and that the added value of partnership working is explicit</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>The council has in place a robust <a href="#">Working in Partnership Framework</a> which is the central point of reference in developing new partnerships, linking the formation of new partnership working opportunities to the delivery of the council's Corporate Plan objectives.</p> <p>Following a full review undertaken in April 2021 which saw the inclusion of a number of key governance controls (e.g. revising the financial threshold for a significant partnership to £50,000 and ensuring equalities objectives and our climate change commitment form key considerations in the evaluation of any partnership arrangement), a programmed review was undertaken in 2023-24, ultimately identifying the existing framework as fit for purpose. As such, a series of minor amendments were proposed and adopted by <a href="#">Council</a> at its meeting in April 2024, with the document subsequently adopted into the council's constituted Policy Framework (see A2).</p> <p>The practical governance of the council's partnership working arrangements, including those of the authority's established shared services, are reviewed on an annual basis to ensure they are robust and maintain the same commitment towards delivery of the corporate objectives. Collectively these arrangements form the <a href="#">Corporate Register of Partnerships</a>.</p> <p>Outside of those formal established partnerships, the council provides financial support for local community groups and stakeholders on application against the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing support to the voluntary and community sector in Gravesham to include partnership working and collaboration;</li> <li>• Provide services that are open to all local residents in need in our community; and</li> <li>• Organisations that help deliver our Community Engagement and Equalities priorities.</li> </ul> <p>Awards are made through a Service Level Agreement (SLA). The awarded SLAs are reviewed at the end of the period to ensure that the council can consider any changes in need and demand, but also to ensure a process where all community organisations can be equally considered for support.</p>
<p><b>B3:</b> <i>Engaging with individual citizens and service users effectively</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing a clear policy on the type of issues that the organisation will meaningfully consult with or involve communities, citizens, service users and other stakeholders to ensure that service provision is contributing to the achievement of intended outcomes.</li> </ul>	<p>Positive and representative consultative activity has the benefit of ensuring local residents and groups are actively engaged, with a stake in civic life.</p> <p>In understanding these benefits, in 2021, the council adopted a new <a href="#">Community Engagement Strategy</a> to provide a framework for developing community engagement activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Being a listening council;</i></li> <li>• <i>Empowering residents and communities;</i></li> <li>• <i>Supporting community organisations; and</i></li> <li>• <i>Building cohesive communities.</i></li> </ul>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p><b>B3:</b> <i>Engaging with individual citizens and service users effectively</i> <i>[cont.]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring that communication methods are effective and that members and officers are clear about their roles in engagement.</li> <li>• Encouraging, collecting and evaluating the views and experiences of communities, citizens, service users and organisations of different backgrounds including reference to future needs.</li> <li>• Implementing effective feedback mechanisms in order to demonstrate how views have been taken into account.</li> <li>• Balancing feedback from more active stakeholder groups with other stakeholder groups to ensure inclusivity.</li> <li>• Taking account of the impact of decisions on future generations of tax payers and service users.</li> </ul>	<p>To practically deliver effective engagement opportunities with local residents, the council has a number of diverse community-based initiatives.</p> <p>For example, the council has a suite of formal engagement forums to enable local residents' effective, informed, and timely opportunities to help shape council policy and, equally, to communicate key announcements and policy decisions. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Gravesham Landlords Forum</a>; and</li> <li>• <a href="#">Gravesham Business Network</a>.</li> </ul> <p>Alongside established forums, the authority provides various consultative opportunities enabling the community to help directly shape service provision (see action below). In 2023-24 opportunities for residents involved consultations in key policy areas such as Community Safety and Licensing.</p> <p><b>COMPLETED ACTION:</b> The consultation exercise carried out for the new Corporate Plan demonstrated a clear public request for more regular and meaningful consultative activity to inform council decision making. In recognising its commitment to continued community development, in 2023-24 the council launched a new branded consultation programme; <a href="#">Gravesham's Big Conversation</a>. Developed and published on an annual basis, the programme provides opportunities for positively shaping council policy and accessible service design, especially important at a time of challenging financial projections, whilst also exploring reflective feedback in terms of resident satisfaction with council services. Over 900 local residents attended <i>Big Conversation</i> events in 2023-24.</p> <p>Alongside these more formal consultative activities and forums, the council facilitates a varied programme of resident engagement. Working closely with local partner agencies, in 2023-24, the authority oversaw 133 community engagement activities for local residents, ranging from Black History Month and litter picks to Gravesham Pride and Inter Faith Walks.</p> <p>To further enable wider community engagement opportunities, residents can use digital platforms such as; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube to get updates from, and interact with, the authority.</p> <p>To be successful in this area the role of Members is crucial, with the <a href="#">Constitution</a> setting out the importance of Members as 'Community Representatives'. In addition, the Constitution established guidelines for public petitions in terms of their administration and how the council would respond, including Council debate.</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Core Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.		
Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<b>C1:</b> <i>Defining outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Having a clear vision which is an agreed formal statement of the organisation's purpose and intended outcomes, containing appropriate performance indicators, which provide the basis for the organisation's overall strategy, planning and other decisions.</li> <li>Specifying the intended impact on, or changes for, stakeholders including citizens and service users. It could be immediately or over the course of a year or longer.</li> <li>Delivering defined outcomes on a sustainable basis within the resources that will be available.</li> <li>Identifying and managing risks to the achievement of outcomes.</li> <li>Managing service users' expectations effectively with regard to determining priorities and making the best use of the resources available.</li> </ul>	<p>The council has in place a clear statement of the organisation's purpose and it's ambition for the borough which underpin the authority's approach to stakeholder engagement.</p> <p><b>COMPLETED ACTION:</b> An essential component in the council's policy framework, the Corporate Plan sets the tone and direction of travel for the authority over a four-year administrative period. Working within the context of the council's strategic ambition for the borough, the plan identifies a suite of corporate objectives and supporting operational policy commitments that determine the scale of projects and planned interventions aimed at improving the lives of Gravesham residents. Following a successful public consultation, and building on the manifesto pledges of the elected administration and core governance considerations, such as the authority's projected financial position, in October 2023, <a href="#">Council</a> endorsed a new plan for the 2023-27 period, ultimately adopting the plan into the constituted Policy Framework.</p> <p>To communicate the council's Corporate Plan, the document is made available via the council's website, complimented internally with a 'lite' or summary version being made available to all staff. This is supported by publications of the council's key activities and service <a href="#">performance</a> via <i>Your Borough</i>. Completing the reporting cycle, the council also reports details of the year-end outturns for the PMF in its <a href="#">Annual Performance Report</a> (see F2).</p> <p>Working in conjunction with the Corporate Plan is the adopted <a href="#">Local Plan</a>, which sets out the statutory spatial framework for growth and development in the borough across; housing needs, commercial, public and private development, including transport infrastructure, and protection for the local environment. Underpinning the delivery of the Local Plan as a framework is the council's <a href="#">Local Development Scheme</a>. Work towards the key milestones within the scheme is monitored through a suite of key controls that are regularly reported through to the CMT and Lead Member. A timetable for adoption of a new Local Plan will be published in 2024-25.</p> <p><b>POTENTIAL ACTION:</b> Bridging both the Corporate Plan and Local Plan documents, it is identified that the authority requires a long-term expression and roadmap to support the borough's ambition and realise its potential. Gravesham 2040 will present a formal strategic vision for the borough, from projects and initiatives happening now, and in the pipeline, new homes and regeneration, through to jobs and skills pathways, inclusive growth for businesses and the visitor economy, and a sustainable future in line with the strategic climate commitment adopted by the authority. In ultimately seeking to make the case for inward investment in the borough, Gravesham 2040 will form an AGS recommendation for 2024-25.</p>



## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>C2:</b> <i>Sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considering and balancing the combined economic, social and environmental impact of policies and plans when taking decisions about service provision.</li> <li>• Taking a longer-term view with regard to decision making, taking account of risk and acting transparently where there are potential conflicts between the organisation’s intended outcomes and short-term factors such as the political cycle or financial constraints.</li> </ul>	<p>In February 2023 <a href="#">Council</a> approved a revised five-year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) spanning 2022-23 to 2026-27. In recognising the council’s financial position and the need to deliver £3.7m of base budget reductions, the MTFS identifies a package of proactive measures intended to restore financial sustainability in the medium term. Section F5 (<i>Strong public financial management</i>) presents more context to the council’s financial position and identifies the key controls adopted to ensure an effective monitoring regime.</p> <p>As part of its plans to diversify its income stream, and ultimately address the continued uncertainty surrounding local government funding, the council has established a Local Authority Trading Company (Rosherville Limited), with subsidiaries Rosherville Servicing Limited, Rosherville Property Development Limited and Rosherville Repairs &amp; Maintenance Limited. The companies have been established to operate with a high degree of commercial freedom, underpinned by a commitment to the principles and best practice advocated by the Lawyers in Local Government guidance note; <i>The Governance of Council Interests in Companies</i>.</p> <p>A further advancement to the council’s operational framework was the creation of an Investment Partnership, aimed at helping accelerate the development of affordable housing within the Borough on sites owned by the authority. The 50:50 nature of the partnership model enables the authority to retain control, whilst providing the partner a commercial imperative to maximise profits, which are split equally. For the council, any profit generated through the partnership could be used to fund future housing development or retrofitting of energy efficiency measures within the existing stock. Such partnerships enable risk-sharing and bring the benefit of commercial skills and expertise, adding social value through training and apprenticeships, and safeguarding quality in trusted track records in the development of new homes.</p> <p>In 2023-24, the social benefits provided by the authority also extended to a new Social Lettings Agency. Since the pandemic, the authority has faced ever-increasing demand for suitable properties to house those who are homeless and in need, resulting in them being placed into temporary accommodation. Due to challenges in accessing the private rented sector locally, the reliance for the provision of temporary accommodation is currently by nightly paid providers, which is the most expensive form of temporary accommodation.</p> <p>As part of its efforts to address this issue, in May 2023 <a href="#">Cabinet</a> agreed to the formation of the Gravesham Social Lettings Agency. The agency provides a safe option for landlords, protecting them from the current perceived volatility in the rental market and cost of living issues, in turn helping create a more secure environment for those most vulnerable residents.</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>C2:</b> <i>Sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits</i> [cont.]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determining the wider public interest associated with balancing conflicting interests between achieving the various economic, social and environmental benefits, through consultation where possible, in order to ensure appropriate trade-offs.</li> <li>• Ensuring fair access to services.</li> </ul>	<p>In seeking added corporate social value, all formal reports in 2023-24 have been drafted with explicit consideration of the combined economic, social, and environmental impact proposed decisions will present the borough.</p> <p>This includes consideration of the borough’s diverse resident population. In 2021 <a href="#">Council</a> adopted a new Equality Policy into the authority’s policy framework, complete with the statutory requirement for a suite of equality objectives to be worked towards in the coming 4-year period.</p> <p>Throughout 2023-24, when undertaking decisions professional advice relating to the advancement of the Equalities agenda, alongside appropriate Equality Impact Assessments, has ensured the potential public interest and impact a decision may bring is fully considered. Specifically, this is carried out in line with the council’s commitment to tackling discrimination, providing equality of opportunity for all and, more broadly, “<i>developing a cohesive and resilient community</i>”.</p> <p>Additionally, in order to ensure fair access to services, the council has in place a <a href="#">Customer Service and Access Strategy</a>. The strategy, complimented by the Accessibility for All procedure, provides a commitment for the council to; “<i>work with our community and service users to understand the longer-term vision and aims for how services will be accessed and will ensure improvements through mechanisms such as the website and contact centre.</i>”</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

<b>Core Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes</b>		
<b>Standard</b>	<b>Method of compliance</b>	<b>Evidence of compliance</b>
<p><b>D1:</b> <i>Determining interventions</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring decision makers receive objective and rigorous analysis of a variety of options indicating how intended outcomes would be achieved and associated risks. Therefore ensuring best value is achieved however services are provided.</li> <li>Considering feedback from citizens and service users when making decisions about service improvements or where services are no longer required in order to prioritise competing demands within limited resources available including people, skills, land and assets and bearing in mind future impacts.</li> </ul>	<p>To inform efficient service delivery, decision makers receive accurate, relevant, and timely performance and intelligence to support them with objective and rigorous analysis of options covering intended outcomes, financial impact and associated risks. This can take the form of regular performance reporting, or bespoke reports. As an example, performance reporting gives Members and service users access to robust information about service delivery, supporting intervention to address any barriers to good performance and equally ensuring value for money is a key consideration of any decision taken by the council.</p> <p>The process of decision making and delegation to officers is detailed in the <a href="#">Constitution</a>, with details of which decisions are to be administered in this way included in the Scheme of Delegation (see E2).</p> <p>Decisions by <a href="#">committees</a> are recorded through committee minutes and are published on the council's website. This is complimented by the publication of key decisions as determined.</p> <p>In establishing policy direction, the council considers not only the needs of local residents and service users but actively consults to identify local service demand. In 2023-24 a series of formal consultations, supported by a programme of consultative events were undertaken that were, or are set to be, fully considered as part of the end policy decisions (see B3).</p>
<p><b>D2:</b> <i>Planning interventions</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing and implementing robust planning and control cycles that cover strategic and operational plans, priorities and targets.</li> <li>Engaging with internal and external stakeholders in determining how services and other courses of action should be planned and delivered.</li> </ul>	<p>An effective <a href="#">PMF</a> is vital to the success of any organisation in delivering consistently high-quality services to local residents. The Corporate Plan, designed in consideration of community need and consultation, presented a new PMF allowing the council to evaluate if it is effectively achieving against the adopted corporate objectives. For residents it provides genuine accountability in how successfully the council is administering its resources.</p> <p>The Cabinet drives the successful implementation of the Corporate Plan, with responsibility for working with, and holding council officers to account, in the delivery of the three adopted strategic objectives. The council recognises that it cannot achieve its vision for the borough on its own and is increasingly working together with partners to achieve these objectives (see B2).</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>D2:</b> <i>Planning interventions</i>  <i>[cont.]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considering and monitoring risks facing each partner when working collaboratively, including shared risks.</li> <li>• Ensuring arrangements are flexible and agile so that the mechanisms for delivering goods and services can be adapted to changing circumstances.</li> <li>• Establishing appropriate key performance indicators (KPIs) as part of the planning process in order to identify how the performance of services and projects is to be measured.</li> <li>• Ensuring capacity exists to generate information required to review service quality regularly.</li> <li>• Preparing budgets in accordance with objectives, strategies and the medium term financial plan.</li> <li>• Informing medium and long term resource planning by drawing up realistic estimates of revenue and capital expenditure aimed at developing a sustainable funding strategy.</li> </ul>	<p>Formal performance reporting takes place at different times and to different audiences in order to ensure fully informed decision making:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quarterly: Performance reports of all tiers of indicators to CMT. Subsequently reported to Cabinet and individual Cabinet Committees for consideration and scrutiny prior to publishing on the council's digital services and <i>Your Borough</i>.</li> <li>• Yearly: <a href="#">Annual Performance Report</a> presenting all performance indicators, including an outline of all relevant achievements directly contributing to the council's corporate objectives, published to the council's transparency webpage.</li> </ul> <p>Timely and accurate reporting of qualitative and quantitative analysis enables early intervention strategies to be implemented in areas of poor performance or increased risk to service delivery.</p> <p>In order to embed performance benchmarking activity all indicators, wherever possible, are compared to other authorities using industry tools e.g. the LGA's LG Inform platform. In 2023-24, a new performance benchmarking report was presented to the CMT. Utilising industry intelligence sourced from the Office for Local Government, the content enabled the authority to better understand its own levels of performance in core frontline service areas, and where any good practice can be identified to feed into the next year's business planning process.</p> <p>More broadly, the council's business planning process specifically links in the activities of the individual departments, and ultimately those of individual officers, with the corporate objectives of the council providing a 'golden thread'; an understanding of how each officer contributes to the delivery of the council's vision. Business Plans are monitored in-year with management indicators reported quarterly to the CMT in order to identify relevant service intervention. Business plans also put in place service (or local) indicators to monitor the delivery of priorities at an operational level, with these reviewed outside the formal corporate reporting process.</p> <p>Underpinning all plans and partnerships is the council's commitment to sound financial planning. The council operates within a strict financial and regulatory environment. The council's financial planning arrangements ensure that finances remain sustainable and robust, and that both revenue and capital resources are aligned with the key policy objectives. This future planning, aimed at resourcing the achievement of core objectives, is evidenced through the council's MTFS.</p> <p>The council continues to work within financial uncertainty making long term financial planning more challenging than previously. Planned reviews by Central Government regarding the longer-term funding arrangements of Local Government continue to be on hold.</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p><b>D2:</b> <i>Planning interventions</i>  [cont.]</p>		<p>The MTFS 2022-23 to 2026-27 established the following principles to direct financial planning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ensure that the finite resources available are aligned to the council’s Corporate Plan objectives;</li> <li>• To preserve a minimum level of £5.25m General Fund working balances (and a minimum level of £3m Housing Revenue Account working balances);</li> <li>• To regularly review its earmarked reserves to ensure these remain fit for purpose and appropriately funded;</li> <li>• To ensure that decisions relating to Council Tax setting are made with due regard to the guidelines issued by the Secretary of State;</li> <li>• To maintain robust budget setting, budget management monitoring and control arrangements; and</li> <li>• To proactively take action as a council to address budget pressures through a well-considered programme of innovation and savings.</li> </ul> <p>During 2024-25 the council will continue to look at ways to reduce costs, increase income and improve efficiency, to help ensure financial resilience in the longer term.</p>
<p><b>D3:</b> <i>Optimising achievement of intended outcomes</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring the medium term financial strategy integrates and balances service priorities, affordability and other resource constraints.</li> <li>• Ensuring the budgeting process is all-inclusive, taking into account the full cost of operations over the medium and longer term.</li> <li>• Ensuring the MTFS sets the context for on-going decisions on significant delivery issues or responses to changes in the external environment that may arise during the budgetary period in order for outcomes to be achieved while optimising resource usage.</li> </ul>	<p>In the spirit of the principles and standards within CIPFA’s <a href="#">Financial Management Code (FM Code)</a>, underpinning all plans and partnerships is the council’s commitment to sound financial planning. The council operates within a strict financial and regulatory environment. The council’s financial planning arrangements ensure that finances remain sustainable and robust, and that both revenue and capital resources are aligned with the key policy objectives.</p> <p>More broadly, to demonstrate that the processes the council has in place satisfy the 17 principles of good financial management established by the FM Code, the council undertook a self-assessment in 2023-24 with the results presented to the <a href="#">Finance and Audit Committee</a>. The assessment concluded that across the 17 financial management standards the authority was fully compliant and that <i>“there are no significant improvements to be made.”</i></p> <p>Annex 2.7 of the Constitution establishes a set of operating Contract Procedure Rules include provision for competition and regulate the manner in which procurement and tendering take place within the authority. Specifically, the rules are adopted to ensure; <i>“that proper stewardship and probity are maintained when the Council, through its Approved Officers, obtains goods and/or services at from purchasing arrangements to ensure value for money.”</i></p>



## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p><b>D3:</b> <i>Optimising achievement of intended outcomes</i> <i>[cont.]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring the achievement of 'social value' through service planning and commissioning.</li> </ul>	<p>In support of these rules, the council has an effective <a href="#">Corporate Procurement Strategy</a> which acts as the foundation on which the authority's approach to procurement is based. Related to this, the council's contract process terms and conditions emphasise the requirement for providers to deliver contracted services on behalf of the council in line with standards expected by government legislation. In regard to 'social value', as part of its procurement strategy, the council has committed to; "<i>Ensure all tenders include consideration of the social value act to encourage opportunities for local employment, local supply chain, apprenticeships and reduced carbon emissions.</i>"</p> <p>The procurement strategy was reviewed in 2023/24, with a new strategy covering the period 2024-2027 approved by Cabinet in March 2024 (see A2).</p> <p>To further enhance the council's commitment to the agenda, the authority has an established Social Value Policy. Refreshed in May 2024, and complemented by a corporate statement and a framework to form the basis of activity, in adopting the policy <a href="#">Cabinet</a> endorsed the following key operating social value principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To champion social value, building a shared understanding both within the organisation and with our partner and local organisations;</li> <li>To achieve local social, economic and environment wellbeing for the Borough and our communities, at no extra cost; and</li> <li>To comply with legislative requirements by being open and transparent in procurement and formally and consistently considering social value.</li> </ul> <p>Any spend arising from social value must be aligned to the council's Corporate Plan objectives.</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

<b>Core Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it</b>		
<b>Standard</b>	<b>Method of compliance</b>	<b>Evidence of compliance</b>
<p><b>E1:</b> <i>Developing the entity's capacity</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing operations, performance and use of assets on a regular basis to ensure their continuing effectiveness.</li> <li>• Improving resource use through appropriate application of techniques such as benchmarking and other options in order to determine how resources are allocated so that defined outcomes are achieved effectively and efficiently.</li> <li>• Recognising the benefits of partnerships and collaborative working where added value can be achieved.</li> <li>• Developing and maintaining an effective workforce plan to enhance the strategic allocation of resources.</li> </ul>	<p>The council has a number of mechanisms in place with which to ensure its continued development, ranging from an Asset Management Plan through to a Workforce Development Plan. These internal controls are in place to improve use of resources now and into the future.</p> <p>One such example, and in support of the adopted Corporate Plan objective <i>#onecouncil</i>, is the authority's Corporate Improvement programme.</p> <p>With a commitment to the delivery of value for money services, a key principle within the council's adopted MTFS (see D2), in March 2021 CMT took the decision to instigate a new Service Review process. The aim of the programme is to review each of the council's services in order to determine if the services are being delivered in the most efficient way and to investigate potential income generating and commercial opportunities.</p> <p>A core objective within the MTFS, the Corporate Improvement Team (CIT) is drawn from across the council's respective directorates. The programme aims to identify the key challenges, opportunities and risks facing all council services, with recommendations being generated that will identify the options for service efficiencies or redesign, alongside potential income generation initiatives.</p> <p>In terms of wider officer development, the council has in place a Workforce Development Plan. The plan has the following key priorities: organisational and leadership development; skills development; recruitment &amp; retention / pay &amp; rewards. Workforce planning is a core business activity for the authority and forms a key part of the evidence base to support the council's <a href="#">Investors in People</a> (IiP) assessment process (see E2).</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p><b>E2:</b> <i>Developing the capability of the entity's leadership and other individuals</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publishing a statement that specifies the types of decisions that are delegated and those reserved for the collective decision making of the governing body.</li> <li>Developing protocols to ensure that elected and appointed leaders negotiate with each other regarding their respective roles early on in the relationship and that a shared understanding of roles and objectives is maintained.</li> <li>Ensuring the leader and the chief executive have clearly defined and distinctive leadership roles within a structure whereby the chief executive leads in implementing strategy and managing the delivery of services and other outputs set by members and each provides a check and a balance for each other's authority.</li> </ul>	<p>A scheme of delegation is in place and is held within Annex 1 of the <a href="#">Constitution</a>. The scheme is considered annually and was re-issued and agreed at <a href="#">Annual Council</a> in May 2023. The scheme sets out responsibilities of the council and those delegated to relevant committees, such as the Finance and Audit Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>The council has appointed a full-time Chief Executive who is also the Head of Paid Service. The council's <a href="#">Constitution</a> (Annex 1 - Section 1.12 – Proper Officers) clearly defines the responsibilities of the Chief Executive.</p> <p>The Chief Executive and the Leader of the council have weekly one-to-one meetings as part of a range of regular communication to ensure appropriate channels of corporate intelligence.</p> <p>With the council having adopted strategic objectives via its Corporate Plan, the authority's CMT is tasked with implementing this political direction and has a number of methods in place to achieve this, including the planning and delivery of a programme of Cabinet Away Days – a recommendation of the last LGA Peer Challenge (G3). Following a self-assessment against DLUHC guidance addressing cultural and governance failings in local authorities, it has been committed that a revised programme for Cabinet Away Days be implemented for 2024-25 (A3).</p> <p>The CMT consists of the Chief Executive, Directors (of which includes the appointed Section 151 Officer), Monitoring Officer (or nominated deputies as required), and the authority's Communications Manager. The agendas and minutes of all CMT meetings are accessible to the entire Wider Management Team (Chief Executive, Directors, Assistant Directors, and Heads of Service) to ensure that all senior managers are able to build a wider knowledge and understanding of the work being undertaken across the authority.</p> <p>Wider Management Team itself continued to meet in 2023-24 on a monthly schedule. Information from these meetings is then disseminated to officers within the departments through the PMF arrangement. In 2023-24, collective WMT project activity has been delivered across key themes including; investigative work to free up a floor in the civic centre, the development of a comprehensive employee support package, and service redesign options as part of a 10% budgetary savings exercise.</p> <p>Regular meetings are also held between the Leader and a number of key officers throughout the organisation, including the Chief Executive, Directors, Section 151 Officer, and Heads of Service. Through these meetings the Leader is able to maintain up-to-date knowledge of key projects and issues and is therefore able to provide effective political leadership. Other Lead Members also hold briefings with key officers of services within their portfolio of responsibilities to ensure there is an understanding of both officer and Member needs throughout the organisation.</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>E2:</b> <i>Developing the capability of the entity's leadership and other individuals</i>  <i>[cont.]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing the capabilities of members and senior management to achieve effective leadership and to enable the organisation to respond successfully to changing legal and policy demands as well as economic, political and environmental changes and risks by:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ ensuring members and staff have access to appropriate induction tailored to their role and that on-going training and development matching individual and organisational requirements is available and encouraged;</li> <li>○ ensuring members and officers have the appropriate skills, knowledge, resources and support to fulfil their roles and responsibilities and ensuring that they are able to continually update their knowledge;</li> <li>○ ensuring personal, organisational and system-wide development through shared learning, including lessons learnt from governance weaknesses both internal and external.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>In regard to sustainable senior officer and Member development, the council has a variety of initiatives in place to ensure the authority can continue to thrive in the challenging and changing legal and policy environment.</p> <p>At an officer level, the council has put in place an induction process which covers key corporate issues and is completed for all new starters across all employment status (full/part-time, temporary contracts, remote workers etc). The process includes the distribution of corporate policies identified for reading and formal sign-off, ensuring all new starters not only receive service specific training but also get an understanding of the corporate organisation and their individual responsibilities.</p> <p>Specific inductions are arranged for those frontline officers working within the council's operational services (e.g., waste operatives) who undertake an induction and training programme which is tailored to their roles within the council prior to commencing their duties. In addition, all officers that are undertaking shared or joint-working initiatives at GBC must go through a 'Shared Services Induction' checklist.</p> <p>In terms of assessment and development, in line with the council's PMF appraisals are to be carried out every year for all officers and half-yearly reviews are also undertaken as required. Through this, officers can assess the levels of performance being realised and, equally, highlight any additional training needs they require in order to meet set targets. These can also be considered through the regular one-to-ones that occur during the year.</p> <p>The council has a defined training budget available which covers qualification training, non-qualification training and Continuous Professional Development (CPD). This enables the council to respond to training needs which come about not only through staff turnover and continued development, but also changes in legislation, such as the requirement for persons involved in civil enforcement to be properly qualified. In addition, each year Heads of Service provide a detailed plan for their own individual services within their Service Business Plan, including those officers requiring professional training qualifications e.g. accountancy.</p> <p>To ensure officers and Members have appropriate knowledge of changing legislative demands on the authority, monthly policy briefings are provided to the council's Wider Management Team that provide a summary of all recent policy announcements and consultations from central government. This is supplemented by timely legislative briefings to Management Team that analyse the government's programme of legislative development.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>E2:</b> <i>Developing the capability of the entity's leadership and other individuals</i> <i>[cont.]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holding staff to account through regular performance reviews which take account of training or development needs.</li> <li>• Ensuring arrangements are in place to maintain the health and wellbeing of the workforce and support individuals in maintaining their own physical and mental wellbeing.</li> <li>• Taking steps to consider the leadership's own effectiveness and ensuring leaders are open to constructive feedback from peer review/inspections.</li> <li>• Ensuring that there are structures in place to encourage public participation.</li> </ul>	<p>The council has fully integrated the principles of leadership and development of its workforce by way of its ongoing commitment to the Investors in People programme. In 2022-23 the council achieved liP Gold accreditation, an improvement from the previous assessment of Silver.</p> <p>As a continuous programme of development, following its latest liP assessment the council put in place a series of positive arrangements to further strengthen its corporate capabilities. As an example, an overarching Project Board has been established in order to further drive the liP agenda across the organisation, ahead of reassessment in 2024-25.</p> <p><b>POTENTIAL ACTION:</b> Underpinning the authority's efforts in the development of its workplace culture is a commitment to the liP accreditation and a pledge established through the Corporate Plan to be a ' platinum employer'. Through this commitment, and in evaluating the corporate development programme implemented since the authority secured Gold accreditation in 2022-23, undertaking an liP reassessment will form an AGS recommendation in 2024-25.</p> <p>An essential part of liP is effective communication channels, and the council has in place several key avenues in this area, including a constituted Staff Forum. The forum fulfils a number of roles but is primarily designed by the CMT to develop a sense of transparency and trust in a two-way form of communication. As an example, the forum is used directly to engage with staff representatives, with feedback used to help inform policy decisions for the well-being of the overall workforce, as well as acting as an engagement hub to communicate core business decisions and the key activities from corporate working groups and the WMT (e.g. staff benefits review).</p> <p>Less formally, the CEO delivers a weekly e-message for all staff. The messages provide a further layer of key communication for all staff, ranging from legislative changes through to acknowledgement of officer achievements and wider corporate insight, such as industry award recognition. At a Member level a similar informal product (<i>Member's Bulletin</i>) is produced to outline key developments in the council and opportunities for engaging with the community at various forums, as well as training and development sessions.</p> <p>More broadly, the council is committed to promoting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of the workforce through specific interventions and opportunities, which form a central responsibility for all managers. There is a dedicated <a href="#">intranet</a> page with a wide range of support and guidance for staff and their managers across the spectrum of health and wellbeing topics including an Employee Assistance Programme and The Gr@nd's personal health programmes.</p>
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<p><b>E2:</b>  <i>Developing the capability of the entity's leadership and other individuals</i>  <i>[cont.]</i></p>		<p>This package of support also includes a Hybrid Working Policy. Following a trial period in 2021-22, the policy was formally adopted into the council's working practices in 2022-23. The aim is to support employees to effectively carry out their roles with the needs of the community being the priority, whilst also recognising the health and well-being benefits hybrid working can bring for employees through an enhanced work/life balance.</p> <p>Ongoing development is also an important feature for Members to allow them to be familiar with how the council works, the rules and procedures under which it operates and the complexities of the elected Member role.</p> <p>A core element to the development plan is an effective training programme, enabling Members to acquire the essential skills required for certain roles/Committees and assisting in preparing Members, especially newly elected, for their decision making roles and responsibilities, where they will be called upon to consider issues and make informed decisions.</p> <p>A mixture of statutory, formal, and awareness/educational sessions, the comprehensive programme is tailored to meet all needs.</p> <p>In January 2024, <a href="#">Cabinet</a> agreed a new Member training programme for 2024-25 (see A2). The programme will include sessions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Statement of Accounts;</li> <li>• Risk Management;</li> <li>• Code of Conduct and Declarations of Interest;</li> <li>• Community Safety and Policing; and</li> <li>• Communications and Social Media.</li> </ul> <p>The council's arrangements for community consultation and the extent of how those feed into local policy development is set out in this review document at B3: <i>Engaging with individual citizens and service users effectively</i>.</p>
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## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

<b>Core Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management</b>		
<b>Standard</b>	<b>Method of compliance</b>	<b>Evidence of compliance</b>
<p><b>F1:</b> <i>Managing risk</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognising that risk management is an integral part of all activities and must be considered in all aspects of decision making.</li> <li>Implementing robust and integrated risk management arrangements and ensuring that they are working effectively.</li> <li>Ensuring that responsibilities for managing individual risks are clearly allocated.</li> </ul>	<p>The council expects volatility and risk in the environment in which it operates. The council has a long-established process in place to identify the principal risks that may influence or impact on the delivery of services. The risk management process requires judgements to be made on the likelihood and impact of a potential risk and enables the council to develop and implement appropriate controls to manage or mitigate these risks to reduce the impact on the council.</p> <p>Monitoring risk is an on-going process and compliments all council projects and day to day business. At a corporate level, an annual review is undertaken of both the council's <a href="#">Risk Management Strategy</a> and the <a href="#">Corporate Risk Register</a>, with results presented to Council.</p> <p>In a long established protocol agreed by Cabinet, the Risk Management Strategy is only presented for approval if the annual review identifies updates and amendments resulting in material changes. The 2023-24 review identified no substantial amendments were required.</p> <p>With regards the development of the Corporate Risk Register, in 2023-24 the annual risk identification exercise was undertaken to identify and evaluate new risks and analyse risks currently recorded in the existing register. Following <a href="#">Finance and Audit Committee</a> endorsement, the council's Corporate Risk Register for 2023-24 was ultimately approved by <a href="#">Council</a>. Progress made against the actions in relation to each risk recorded in the Corporate Risk Register will be monitored quarterly by the Risk Management Working Group and key findings presented via a half yearly report to the Finance &amp; Audit Committee.</p> <p>In seeking to provide broader corporate oversight of the operational risk environment, the internal Risk Management Working Group meets on a quarterly basis, with subsequent reporting to CMT. A key component of the CIPFA FM Code, this pooled corporate resource enables the sharing of knowledge and common understanding of the current and future risks to the authority and its service areas. The group's formation also aids the risk evaluation process, whereby an identified risk at service level could be escalated to the Corporate Risk Register as required.</p> <p>Each service must also consider risk as part of the business planning, project management and other corporate processes, and equally identify relevant actions and controls to put in place to mitigate identified operational risks. Additionally, all committee and CMT reports presented in 2023-24 include an appendix that identifies the 'implications' of any decisions being recommended through the report, including a specific assessment of risk.</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>F2:</b> <i>Managing performance</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring service delivery effectively including planning, specification, execution and independent review.</li> <li>• Providing members and senior management with regular reports on service delivery plans and on progress towards outcome achievement.</li> <li>• Making decisions based on relevant, clear objective analysis and advice pointing out the implications and risks inherent in the organisation's financial, social and environmental position and outlook.</li> <li>• Ensuring an effective scrutiny or oversight function is in place which provides constructive challenge and debate on policies and objectives before, during and after decisions are made thereby enhancing the organisation's performance and that of any organisation for which it is responsible.</li> <li>• Ensuring there is consistency between specification stages (such as budgets) and post implementation reporting (e.g. financial statements).</li> </ul>	<p>An effective PMF is vital in delivering consistently high-quality services for local residents. The Corporate Plan, designed in consideration of community need and consultation, presented a new PMF allowing the council to evaluate its performance by introducing measurable indicators for each adopted policy commitment. Formal qualitative and quantitative reports are presented quarterly to the appropriate Cabinet Committee, enabling scrutiny in the performance of the council's key frontline services. This is supported by publications of the authority's key activities and service <a href="#">performance</a> via <i>Your Borough</i>. Completing the reporting cycle, the council also presents details of the year-end outturns for the framework in its <a href="#">Annual Performance Report</a>.</p> <p>To help facilitate delivery, a Corporate Delivery Plan has been established to further enhance the governance framework of the authority. Drawing together the key projects and initiatives of service business plans and other sources, the material is presented against the council's Corporate Plan commitments to chart their respective delivery. The document forms the basis of senior management 1-1 activity, for which a specific template has also been designed, including details of any assigned Management Team or Committee actions.</p> <p>More broadly, the council's annual business planning process specifically links in the activities of the individual departments, and ultimately those of individual officers, with the corporate objectives of the council providing a 'golden thread'; an understanding of how each officer contributes to the delivery of the council's vision. A key element to the process is the ability to define clear performance indicators for individual service objectives, coupled with a specific assessment to identify potential risks to services achieving objectives and mitigating actions.</p> <p>Corporate reporting is supplemented by individual services and thematic or project reporting. For example, having passed its climate motion in June 2019, the council committed to establishing the agenda as a strategic theme to underpin the projects, initiatives and work involved in the delivery of the council's Corporate Plan, as it works towards its ambition of carbon neutral status by 2030. In doing so a pledge was made to produce an Annual Report, with the latest edition presented to <a href="#">Council</a> in December 2023.</p> <p>The governance of the climate change agenda is further enhanced through the council's first Climate Change Strategy, which aims to clearly articulate the actions that need to be taken in order to meet the council's net zero ambition. In overseeing the implementation of the decisions, design and performance of the projects and initiatives involved in the strategy, the council also has in place a Climate Change Advisory Board, which is also tasked with reporting back to Cabinet on a six-monthly cycle.</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>F2:</b> <i>Managing performance</i> <i>[cont.]</i></p>		<p>Annex 1 of the <a href="#">Constitution</a> sets out the responsibilities of the council and the responsibilities delegated to committees including those of the Overview Scrutiny committee.</p> <p>The Overview Scrutiny Committee meets on a monthly basis, with agendas, minutes and details of Membership published to the council's <a href="#">website</a>.</p> <p>Chaired by the Leader of the Opposition, the committee is able to 'call-in' decisions from the Cabinet in order for them to be further scrutinised.</p> <p>The Overview Scrutiny Committee undertakes its core activity through a programme of reviews within agreed policy areas, with Street Cleanliness, Littering and Fly-tipping recent completed project examples. A new policy review programme is set to be agreed in 2024-25.</p> <p>To underpin the development of the Committee as an effective scrutiny or oversight function, in July 2023 a dedicated training session was delivered for Overview Scrutiny Committee members, to ensure they have the skills and independent mindset to hold the Cabinet to account.</p> <p><b>POTENTIAL ACTION:</b> In 2023-24, guidance was issued by DLUHC in order to address cultural and governance failings in local authorities, as identified by recent government interventions. A key indicator in the presented DLUHC framework is the requirement for a fully effective scrutiny function. As such, following a self-assessment, it was agreed by Cabinet that training should be provided to all Members on the role, responsibility, and importance an effective scrutiny or oversight function delivers as part of the council's system of operational governance.</p> <p>Building on the specific training delivered for Members of the Overview Scrutiny Committee in July 2023, it is therefore recommended that the Member Training Plan agreed by Cabinet in 2023-24 be revised to accommodate an additional <i>Introduction to Scrutiny</i> session for all Members in 2024-25, alongside further specific scrutiny training for Overview Scrutiny Committee members to ensure they have the skills and independent mindset to hold the Cabinet to account.</p> <p>Annex 2 of the <a href="#">Constitution</a> sets out the Financial Procedure Rules for the council. This provides a framework to the development of the Budget, arrangements and controls for budgetary control, and the end stage of auditing of the council's accounts. The council's <a href="#">transparency</a> webpage includes details of the Civic Budget Book and the published financial statements, along with a series of core financial policies.</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>F3:</b> <i>Robust internal control</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aligning the risk management strategy and policies on internal control with achieving objectives.</li> <li>• Evaluating and monitoring risk management and internal control on a regular basis.</li> <li>• Ensuring effective counter fraud and anti-corruption arrangements are in place.</li> <li>• Ensuring additional assurance on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the framework of governance, risk management and control is provided by the internal auditor.</li> <li>• Ensuring an audit committee or equivalent group/ function, which is independent of the executive and accountable to the governing body:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ provides a further source of effective assurance regarding arrangements for managing risk and maintaining an effective control environment;</li> <li>○ that its recommendations are listened to and acted upon.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>The purpose of the council's Risk Management Strategy is; <i>"to embed risk management into the daily operations of the council. Good risk management will lead to good management, good performance, good stewardship of public money, good public engagement and, ultimately, good outcomes for citizens and service users."</i></p> <p>The strategy is reviewed and updated annually and presented to Cabinet when substantial changes are required.</p> <p>Practical delivery of the council's risk management processes is outlined at F1: Managing Risk.</p> <p>Annex 1 of the Constitution establishes the responsibilities of the council and those delegated to committees including the Finance and Audit Committee which has a dual responsibility to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform the risk assessment process used to develop the Risk Management Strategy and Corporate Risk Register for the Council.</li> <li>• Monitor the effective development &amp; operation of risk management in the authority.</li> </ul> <p>This responsibility helps strengthen the council's risk management arrangements, providing close scrutiny of the management actions specified in the Corporate Risk Register and equally enabling an enhanced contribution to the development of the annual register itself.</p> <p>Additionally, in monitoring the council's risks the Finance and Audit Committee oversee a <a href="#">mid-year review</a> of the Corporate Risk Register, offering Members the opportunity to review both existing risks and mitigation activity, and to suggest the addition of new risks for consideration.</p> <p>Internal Audit and Counter Fraud activity is delivered through a shared service with Medway Council, with a strategy in place to outline the core objectives of the service. In delivering against this strategy, and in order to comply with the <a href="#">Public Sector Internal Audit Standards</a> (PSIAS), the service presents individual Internal Audit and Counter Fraud plans, which are approved by the <a href="#">Finance and Audit Committee</a>.</p> <p>The Plans include details of the resources dedicated to deliver a programme of planned work to assist the council in strengthening their internal control environment and outline how counter fraud resource will be deployed in various areas of proactive counter fraud work and reactive investigations into referrals received and frauds identified.</p>



## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>F3:</b> <i>Robust internal control</i> <i>[cont.]</i></p>		<p>The Internal Audit Plan is delivered in two 6-monthly increments, enabling the service to be more responsive to changes, manage resources in a more efficient manner, and ensure audit resources are focussed in the highest risk areas. Following approval of the original Q1 &amp; Q2 plan, the Audit Risk Assessment is refreshed and used to update the plan for the second half of the year, based on any changes to risk landscape or legislative requirements. In 2023-24, the Q3 and Q4 plan was subsequently approved at September's <a href="#">Finance and Audit Committee</a>.</p> <p>In monitoring progress against the adopted Internal Audit plans, and in line with the agreed Internal Audit Quality Assurance &amp; Improvement Programme (QAIP), in 2023-24 the Finance &amp; Audit Committee received regular reports detailing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proportion of actions agreed by client management;</li> <li>• The number of actions agreed that are; not yet due, implemented and outstanding; and,</li> <li>• The proportion of agreed actions implemented by the agreed target date;</li> <li>• The position of all agreed actions currently within the follow-up process.</li> </ul> <p>In addition, the Finance &amp; Audit Committee also received details of all actions that remained outstanding more than six months after the scheduled implementation date. Services are provided with an opportunity to provide an update to be included in the report explaining any reasons for delay and may also requested to attend the Committee.</p> <p>Following an annual review, in March 2024, the <a href="#">Finance &amp; Audit Committee</a> also agreed to a revised QAIP for 2024-25. Additionally, new Global Internal Audit Standards were released in January 2024, to take effect from January 2025. Any new requirements for the QAIP will therefore be considered as part of the annual review in 2024-25 and incorporated for 2025-26.</p> <p>In 2023-24, the <a href="#">Finance and Audit Committee</a> were presented with the findings of an External Quality Assessment into the services provided by the Internal Audit team. Undertaken on a minimum 5-yearly cycle as per PSIAS, Gravesham's Internal Audit service received a green opinion which stated that; <i>"The Internal Audit Shared Service is delivering to a standard that generally conforms with the PSIAS"</i>.</p> <p>In light of the full audit programme of assurance reviews undertaken in 2023-24, the Head of Internal Audit was able to provide a full opinion, delivered in direct consideration of the <a href="#">CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Public Service Organisations</a> (see G3).</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p><b>F3:</b> <i>Robust internal control</i> <i>[cont.]</i></p>		<p>To provide an effective framework for counter fraud and anti-corruption arrangements, the council has an established <a href="#">Counter Fraud and Corruption Strategy</a> for the authority. Working alongside the council's <a href="#">Anti-Money Laundering Policy</a> and <a href="#">Whistleblowing Policy</a>, the documents are collectively designed to develop an effective working environment that supports its zero-tolerance approach towards fraud, bribery, and corrupt activity. To communicate the council's commitment, all are published to the council's website.</p> <p>The Finance &amp; Audit Committee received periodic update reports throughout the year, providing details of the work undertaken in the areas detailed in the annual counter fraud plan. The plan includes a list of performance measures that are also reported against in all update reports.</p> <p>In March 2024, the <a href="#">Finance and Audit Committee</a> subsequently considered and approved a proposed Counter Fraud Plan for 2024-25, designed around four key areas of activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fraud Awareness and Prevention;</li> <li>• Pro-Active Counter Fraud Activity;</li> <li>• Responsive Investigation Activity; and</li> <li>• Other Counter Fraud Activity.</li> </ul>
<p><b>F4:</b> <i>Managing data</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring effective arrangements are in place for the safe collection, storage, use and sharing of data, including processes to safeguard personal data.</li> <li>• Ensuring effective arrangements are in place and operating effectively when sharing data with other bodies.</li> <li>• Reviewing and auditing regularly the quality and accuracy of data used in decision making and performance monitoring.</li> </ul>	<p>As a data controller, registered with the Information Commissioner's Office, the council collects, holds and uses data about people and organisations with whom it deals to conduct its business. As part of the council's governance control arrangements, the authority's <a href="#">Data Protection Policy</a> outlines the scope of the agenda and the measures put in place to mitigate the risk of data breaches, and includes the commitment to securing and processing personal data in line with the UK General Data Protection Regulation and current data protection legislation.</p> <p>The policy sets out the appointed Data Protection officers charged with promoting and monitoring compliance within the authority. As part of the council's work to enhance the level of governance control in this area, all formal decisions and committee reports require consideration of the need for a relevant data impact assessment. The policy is reviewed by members of the Information Governance Strategy Group which holds responsibility to oversee the council's compliance with information governance legislation and maintenance of the data governance framework. The policy is scheduled for formal review in 2024-25.</p> <p>The council's arrangements to strategically manage information, including compliance with key standards, is scrutinised on a more regular and comprehensive basis through the Information Governance Annual Report presented to the <a href="#">Performance and Administration Committee</a>.</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p><b>F4:</b> <i>Managing data</i> <i>[cont.]</i></p>		<p>The council provides material to the public via the information access regime as part of the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) 2004. Individuals may also access their own personal data by exercising the right of subject access under the Data Protection Act 1998. As with the Data Protection Policy, the council's Subject Access Request Policy is due for review in 2024-25.</p> <p>The authority also complies with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 by publishing accurate data within appropriate timeframes to the <a href="#">council's website</a>.</p> <p>The council has also committed as a signatory to the current <a href="#">Kent and Medway Information Sharing Agreement</a>. The main purpose of the agreement is to provide services in Kent and Medway with a best practice framework for the governance and exchange of personal and sensitive data. Procedures on how to comply with the framework, including relevant administrative arrangements, are made available to council officers as required. This agenda is overseen by the council's Information Governance Strategy Group, chaired by the Director (Corporate Services); the council's appointed Senior Information Risk Officer.</p> <p>More broadly, the council is dedicated to continually seeking to improve the scope and quality of its data to support good decision making and improved service outcomes. Part of this relates the council's PMF which makes clear the authority's commitment and arrangements to ensuring good data quality, involving in-year spot-checks and verification of performance data. In 2023-24, this framework was enhanced by a dedicated allocation of consultancy from Internal Audit to help ensure robust data reporting processes are in place for higher risk service areas.</p> <p>Collectively these processes ensure the most accurate and up to date performance information, vital for decision making purposes at a strategic CMT and Member level.</p>
<p><b>F5:</b> <i>Strong public financial management</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring financial management supports both long term achievement of outcomes and short-term financial and operational performance.</li> </ul>	<p>Since the start of the government's austerity programme in 2010, local government funding has been significantly reduced. In 2010-11 some 60% of council funding was received through Central Government Grant. Due to changes in central government policy, this position has now evolved to around 96% of funding being generated through council tax and retained business rates receipts. Moreover, the council continues to work within strategic financial uncertainty making long term planning more challenging than previously. Planned reviews regarding the longer-term funding of local government continue to be delayed.</p> <p>Against that backdrop, in February 2023 <a href="#">Council</a> approved a revised five-year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) spanning 2022-23 to 2026-27. The MTFS accurately presents the council's financial position and the need to deliver £3.7m of base budget reductions.</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p><b>F5:</b> <i>Strong public financial management</i> <i>[cont.]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring well-developed financial management is integrated at all levels of planning and control, including management of financial risks and controls.</li> </ul>	<p>In response to the financial challenge, the MTFs identifies a package of proactive measures intended to restore financial sustainability in the medium term. In 2023-24 corporate initiatives amounting to savings of £1.87m were delivered. Progress against delivery of identified initiatives is monitored by the CMT, with reports provided on a monthly basis.</p> <p>The core principles underlying the MTFs are presented at D2: <i>Planning interventions</i>.</p> <p>Within the council's financial planning are a number of more short-term controls to manage the council's finances in line with achieving adopted corporate objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An annually agreed <a href="#">Civic Budget Book</a> for the council sets out the budgetary requirements for the year. Effective management controls are in place, with quarterly budget monitoring reports presented to the Cabinet and Finance and Audit Committee.</li> <li>A set of <a href="#">Financial Statements</a> are produced for each financial year, in line with CIPFA's <a href="#">Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting</a>. The Statement of Accounts summarises the council's financial performance during the year and includes key financial statements (see G2: <i>Implementing good practices in reporting</i>).</li> <li>The council's <a href="#">Capital Strategy</a> is intended to outline the principles followed by the authority in its approach to capital investment over the long-term. Annually reviewed, the strategy sets out the framework within which the authority will plan, procure, prioritise and manage its capital investment and financing decisions in delivery of the council's objectives, with intrinsic links to the <a href="#">Treasury Management Strategy</a>.</li> <li>The council has adopted CIPFA's <a href="#">Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice 2021</a>, producing an annual <a href="#">Treasury Management Report</a> (including the Annual Investment Strategy Report) and an annual <a href="#">Treasury Management Review</a>, outlining activities and performance for the previous year. The council also submits regular in-year treasury management monitoring reports to the Finance &amp; Audit Committee.</li> </ul> <p>Through a fixed position within the CMT, the Section 151 Officer ensures that appropriate advice is given on all financial matters, proper financial records and accounts are kept, and oversees an effective system of financial control.</p> <p>Annex 2 of the <a href="#">Constitution</a> sets out the Financial Procedure Rules for the council. This provides a framework to the development of the Budget, arrangements and controls for budgetary control, and the end stage of auditing of the council's accounts.</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

<b>Core Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability</b>		
<b>Standard</b>	<b>Method of compliance</b>	<b>Evidence of compliance</b>
<p><b>G1:</b> <i>Implementing good practice in transparency</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing and communicating reports for the public and other stakeholders in an understandable style appropriate to the intended audience and ensuring that they are easy to access and interrogate.</li> <li>• Striking a balance between providing the right amount of information to satisfy transparency demands and enhance public scrutiny while not being too onerous to provide and for users to understand.</li> </ul>	<p>The council continues to be committed to the government's transparency agenda and is compliant with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015.</p> <p>A specific section of the <a href="#">council's website</a> has been created in order to enable the timely and accurate publication of a number of key data sets and formal reports including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior Staff Salaries &amp; Organisation chart;</li> <li>• Fees, charges and contracts data;</li> <li>• Civic Budget Book and Financial Statements;</li> <li>• Pay Policy Statement; and</li> <li>• Member Allowances.</li> </ul>
<p><b>G2:</b> <i>Implementing good practices in reporting</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting at least annually on performance, value for money and the stewardship of its resources.</li> <li>• Ensuring the performance information that accompanies the financial statements is prepared on a consistent and timely basis and the statements allow for comparison with other similar organisations.</li> <li>• Ensuring members and senior management own the results.</li> </ul>	<p>Complementing formal reporting processes to Members – as set out throughout this review document – the council's website forms an essential part in delivering the authority's commitment to openness and transparency in how it conducts its business.</p> <p>Reports available via the Council's <a href="#">Transparency</a> webpage include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Performance Report: Alongside the quarterly monitoring reports presented to Cabinet Committees and summarised in <i>Your Borough</i> publications, the council also produces an Annual Performance Report to complete the reporting process. In 2023-24 the council therefore published its <a href="#">Annual Performance Report</a> for 2022-23.</li> <li>• Financial Statements: The <a href="#">Statement of Accounts</a>, produced each year, summarises the council's financial performance during the year and includes core financial statements supported by key notes. The Statement of Accounts also includes a dedicated section to performance management. The presented performance indicators have been selected not only to evidence the link between the resourcing of the council against the delivery of its core objectives but, as nationally reported indicators, to also enable accurate performance benchmarking against peer authorities, helping support the authority in measuring its comparative value for money.</li> </ul>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>G2:</b> <i>Implementing good practices in reporting</i> <i>[cont.]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring robust arrangements for assessing the extent to which the principles contained in the Framework have been applied and publishing the results on this assessment including an action plan for improvement and evidence to demonstrate good governance.</li> <li>• Ensuring that the Framework is applied to jointly managed or shared service organisations as appropriate.</li> </ul>	<p><b>COMPLETE &amp; POTENTIAL ACTION:</b> Local audit is a key source of assurance and provides independent checks and balances within the local accountability framework. A significant number of local audits in England remain outstanding, with some dating back to 2015-16. Having agreed a joint high-level delivery plan with Grant Thornton, in <a href="#">December 2023</a> the Finance and Audit Committee approved for the Chair to sign the audited Statement of Accounts for 2019-20 and the Letter of Representation, alongside a revised Annual Governance Statement for the year. The Statement of Accounts for 2019-20 received auditor sign-off in February 2024.</p> <p>In February 2024 consultation proposals were issued by government to clear the backlog of audit opinions and put the system on a sustainable footing moving forward. Whilst the consultation has been concluded, we await the outcome following the General Election. With audit opinions outstanding from 2020-21, during 2024-25 the council will do what is within its control to produce the outstanding draft financial statements for 2021-22 and 2022-23 and conclude the agreed audit processes associated with these periods. The council will also work with the external auditor to complete the audit of the 2023-24 financial statements by the agreed audit deadline once this has been confirmed.</p> <p>The council has adopted a Code of Corporate Governance (the Code). The Code acts as the cornerstone to the council's governance framework by which it is accountable to its users and wider community stakeholders. Within that framework, the Code sets out a commitment as to how the council carries out its functions, and the procedures and processes by which it undertakes to deliver the adopted Corporate Objectives. The Code is subject to annual review and ensures governance arrangements are consistent with the core governance principles as set out in the '<i>Delivering Good Governance</i>' framework, published by CIPFA/SOLACE. The current framework on its publication resulted in a new code, approved by Council.</p> <p>In delivering on its statutory duty, the council annually reviews its governance environment, culminating in the production of an AGS, approved by the <a href="#">Finance and Audit Committee</a>. The review extends to the council's shared services as relevant assurance statements from Heads of Service are secured as part of the review process. The <a href="#">AGS</a> includes a detailed action plan setting milestones for the year ahead to deliver activities that further strengthen controls.</p>



## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

Standard	Method of compliance	Evidence of compliance
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>G3:</b> <i>Assurance and effective accountability</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring that recommendations for corrective action made by external audit are acted upon.</li> <li>• Ensuring an effective internal audit service with direct access to members is in place which provides assurance with regard to governance arrangements and recommendations are acted upon.</li> <li>• Welcoming peer challenge, reviews and inspections from regulatory bodies and implementing recommendations.</li> <li>• Gaining assurance on risks associated with delivering services through third parties and that this is evidenced in the annual governance statement.</li> <li>• Ensuring that when working in partnership, arrangements for accountability are clear and that the need for wider public accountability has been recognised and met.</li> </ul>	<p>In line with the published CIPFA guidance, as part of the annual review of governance controls a specific assurance statement was completed by the Head of Internal Audit to demonstrate how the council has complied with the <a href="#">CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Public Service Organisations</a>. This was complimented by the Section 151 Officer completing a specific ‘Chief Financial Officer’ assurance statement which sets out how the council has complied with the <a href="#">CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government</a>, as well as how the council has met its Section 151 obligations as set out within the Constitution. There were no issues of concern raised by either the Chief Financial Officer or the Head of Internal Audit. These statements form a key part of the annual review of governance control arrangements, the basis of the council’s AGS.</p> <p>The annual report from the Local Government Ombudsman is also considered by the <a href="#">Finance and Audit Committee</a>.</p> <p>In 2019-20, the council undertook an LGA corporate peer challenge exercise. Amongst its core recommendations that have been formulated into a detailed action plan, the peer team found Gravesham to be a well-run council with a proactive approach to dealing with the financial challenges of the last decade. It was committed that a report be brought back to Cabinet in 2021 to provide an update to Members on progress against the action plan and this was duly presented. In 2021-22, <a href="#">Cabinet</a> determined that the remaining activities be incorporated within the relevant service area business plans, with a commitment to continued Lead Member progress briefings. Work continued in delivering on the adopted action plan into 2023-24.</p> <p>In recognising the benefits provided by the peer-learning programme, planning for a future LGA Peer Challenge commenced in 2023-24 following the 2023 local elections, with the exercise likely due to be held in 2025.</p> <p>The council has in place a robust <a href="#">Working in Partnership Framework</a> which is the central point of reference in developing new partnerships for the council, linking the formation of new partnership working opportunities to the delivery of the Corporate Plan’s objectives.</p> <p>The framework outlines what is expected of Members, officers and external parties in terms of accountability: <i>“They should be accountable to the public for their actions and the manner in which they carry out their responsibilities and should co-operate fully and honestly with any scrutiny appropriate to their particular office.”</i> Following a review, a revised Framework was agreed by <a href="#">Council</a> in April 2024 and adopted into the authority’s constituted Policy Framework (see B2).</p>

## Annual Review of Governance: 2023-24

### References

CIPFA:

- *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*
- *The role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government*
- *Financial Management Code*
- *Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting*
- *Treasury Management in the Public Services: code of practice*
- *Statement on the role of the Head of Internal Audit in public sector organisations*
- *Public Sector Internal Audit Standards*

Gravesham Borough Council:

- *Code of Corporate Governance*