



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

Code of Corporate Governance

Review date: 30 March 2024

March 2023

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Introduction

In 2016 CIPFA & SOLACE produced an updated guidance and framework with the identified principles that should underpin the governance of each local authority, and a structured approach to assist individual authorities to achieve good governance, “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework 2016 Edition.”

The Council’s Code of Corporate Governance is based upon this guidance.

What is Governance?

Governance is about how the Council ensures that it is doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. It comprises the systems and processes, and cultures and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and through which it accounts to, engages with and leads its communities.

Corporate governance in public bodies can be defined as “the framework of accountability to users, stakeholders and the wider community, within which organisations take decisions and lead and control their functions, to achieve their objectives”. It can be further defined as including “robust systems and processes, effective leadership and high standards of behaviour, a culture based on openness and honesty and an external focus on the needs of service users and the public”.

GUIDANCE AND FRAMEWORK

The Framework urges local authorities to test their structures against seven core principles by:

- Reviewing their existing governance arrangements against the Framework
- Developing and maintaining an up-to-date local code of governance including arrangements for ensuring its ongoing application and effectiveness
- Preparing an Annual Governance Statement in order to report publicly on the extent to which they comply with their own code, including how they have monitored the effectiveness of their governance arrangements in the year, and on any planned changes for the coming period.

The preparation and publication of an annual governance statement in accordance with this Framework is necessary to meet the statutory requirement set out in Regulation 6 (4) of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 for authorities to prepare a statement of internal control in accordance with “proper practices”.

Internal control and risk management are increasingly recognised as important elements of good Corporate Governance.

The scope of internal control spans the whole range of the Council's activities and includes controls designed to ensure that:

- The Council's policies are implemented in practice;
- High quality services are delivered efficiently and effectively;
- The Council's values and ethical standards are met;
- Laws and Regulations are complied with
- Required procedures are adhered to;
- Financial statements and other published performance information is accurate and reliable;
- Human, financial, environmental and other resources are managed efficiently and effectively.

The Regulations place a requirement on the Council to conduct an annual review of the effectiveness of its internal controls and identify areas where improvements can be made.

POSITION IN OXFORDSHIRE

The implementation of the Accounts and Audit Regulations required the production of a Statement on Internal Control, which formed part of the Council's Statement of Accounts. The Council's Corporate Governance Assurance Framework sets out the Corporate Governance arrangements within the Council and sets out the roles and responsibilities of key Officers, Councillors and Committees within that process.

This Code of Corporate Governance sets out how Oxfordshire County Council complies with the requirements of the Code and identifies key documents, which provide detailed information as to how the Council ensures these Corporate Governance principles are adhered to.

Core Principles

The Council's Code of Corporate Governance is based on seven core principles: -

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

The Code specifically identifies the actions and behaviours taken by the Council in relation to each of these core principles and associated sub principles. The Code, along with its supporting infrastructure is set out below at Appendix A, with evidence of compliance summarised in in Appendix B.

The Audit and Governance Committee is currently responsible for approving this Code and ensuring it is annually reviewed and updated accordingly.

Next Review date: 30 March 2024

Appendix A - Actions and behaviours taken by the Council that demonstrate good governance

As taken from 2016 CIPFA & SOLACE: “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework 2016 Edition”

Principle	Sub Principles	Council Actions and Behaviours
(A) Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong Commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law	Behaving with integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure that Members and Officers behave with integrity and lead a culture where acting in the public interest is visible and consistently demonstrated thereby protecting the reputation of the Council; ▪ Ensure that Members take the lead in establishing specific standard operating principles or values for the Council and its staff and that they are communicated and understood. These will build on the Seven Principles of Public Life (The Nolan Principles); ▪ Lead by example and use the above standard operating principles or values as a framework for decision making and other actions; and ▪ Demonstrate, communicate and embed the standard operating principles or values through appropriate policies and processes which will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they are operating effectively.
	Demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seek to establish, monitor and maintain the Council’s ethical standards and performance; ▪ Underpin personal behaviour with ethical values and ensure they permeate all aspects of the Council’s culture and operation; ▪ Develop and maintain robust policies and procedures which place emphasis on agreed ethical values; and ▪ Ensure 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 Council.
	Respecting the Rule of Law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure Members and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the rule of the law as well as adhering to relevant laws and regulations; ▪ Create 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 provisions; ▪ Strive to optimise the use of the full powers available for the benefit of citizens, communities and other stakeholders; ▪ Deal with breaches of legal and regulatory provisions effectively; and ▪ Ensure corruption and misuse of power is dealt with effectively.
(B) Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement	Openness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure an open culture through demonstrating, documenting, and communicating the Council’s commitment to openness; ▪ Make decisions that are open about actions, plans, resource use, forecasts, outputs, and outcomes. The presumption will be for openness. If that is not the case, a justification for the reasoning for keeping a decision confidential will be provided; ▪ Provide clear reasoning and evidence for decisions in both public records and explanations to stakeholders and will be explicit about the criteria, rationale and considerations used. In due course, the Council will ensure that the impact and consequences of those decisions are clear; and ▪ Use formal and informal consultation and engagement to determine the most appropriate and effective interventions / courses of action.
	Engaging comprehensively with institutional stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effectively engage 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; ▪ Develop formal and informal partnerships to allow for resources to be used more efficiently and outcomes achieved more effectively; and ▪ Ensure that partnerships are based on trust, a shared commitment to change, a culture that promotes and accepts challenge among partners and that the added value of partnership working is explicit.
	Engaging stakeholders individual citizens and service users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish a clear policy on the type of issues that the Council will meaningfully consult with or involve communities, individual citizens, service users and other stakeholders to ensure that service (or other) provision is contributing towards the achievement of intended outcomes; ▪ Ensure that communication methods are effective, and that Members and Officers are clear about their roles with regard to community engagement; ▪ Encourage, collect, and evaluate the views and experiences of communities, citizens, service users and organisations of different backgrounds including reference to future needs; ▪ Implement effective feedback mechanisms in order to demonstrate how their views have been taken into account; ▪ Balance feedback from more active stakeholder groups with other stakeholder groups to ensure inclusivity; and ▪ Take account of the interests of future generations of taxpayers and service users.

Principle	Sub Principles	Council Actions and Behaviours
(C) Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits	Defining outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have a clear vision, which is an agreed formal statement of the Council’s purpose and intended outcomes containing appropriate performance indicators, which provides the basis for the Council’s overall strategy, planning, and other decisions; ▪ Specify 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; ▪ Deliver defined outcomes on a sustainable basis within the resources that will be available; ▪ Identify and manage risks to the achievement of outcomes; and ▪ Manage service users’ expectations effectively with regard to determining priorities and making the best use of the resources available.
	Sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consider and balance the combined economic, social, and environmental impact of policies, plans and decisions when taking decisions about service provision; ▪ Take a longer- term view with regard to decision making, taking account of risk and acting transparently where there are potential conflicts between the Council’s intended outcomes and short-term factors such as the political cycle or financial constraints; ▪ Determine 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; and ▪ Ensure fair access to services.
(D) Determining the interventions necessary to optimise	Determining interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure decision makers receive objective and rigorous analysis of a variety of options indicating how intended outcomes would be achieved and including the risks associated with those options. Therefore, ensuring best value is achieved however services are provided; and ▪ Consider 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.
	Planning interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish and implement robust planning and control cycles that cover strategic and operational plans, priorities and targets; ▪ Engage with internal and external stakeholders in determining how services and other courses of action should be planned and delivered; ▪ Consider and monitor risks facing each partner when working collaboratively including shared risks; ▪ Ensure arrangements are flexible and agile so that the mechanisms for delivering outputs can be adapted to changing circumstances; ▪ Establish 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; ▪ Ensure capacity exists to generate the information required to review service quality regularly; ▪ Prepare budgets in accordance with organisational objectives, strategies and the medium-term financial plan; and ▪ Inform medium and long-term resource planning by drawing up realistic estimates of revenue and capital expenditure aimed at developing a sustainable funding strategy.
	Optimising intended outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure the medium-term financial strategy integrates and balances service priorities, affordability, and other resource constraints; ▪ Ensure the budgeting process is all-inclusive, taking into account the full cost of operations over the medium and longer term; ▪ Ensure the medium-term financial strategy sets the context for ongoing 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; and ▪ Ensure the achievement of ‘social value’ through service planning and commissioning. The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 states that this is “the additional benefit to the community...over and above the direct purchasing of goods, services and outcomes”.

Principle	Sub Principles	Council Actions and Behaviours
(E) Developing the Council's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it	Developing the Council's capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review operations, performance use of assets on a regular basis to ensure their continuing effectiveness; ▪ Improve resource use through appropriate application of techniques such as benchmarking and other options in order to determine how the Council's resources are allocated so that outcomes are achieved effectively and efficiently; ▪ Recognise the benefits of partnerships and collaborative working where added value can be achieved; and ▪ Develop and maintain an effective workforce plan to enhance the strategic allocation of resources.
	Developing the capability of the County Council's leadership and other individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop 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; ▪ Publish a statement that specifies the types of decisions that are delegated and those reserved for the collective decision making of the governing body; ▪ Ensure the Leader and the Chief Executive have clearly defined and distinctive leadership roles within a structure whereby the Chief Executive leads the Council 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; ▪ Develop the capabilities of Members and senior management to achieve effective shared 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"> ➢ ensuring Members and staff have access to appropriate induction tailored to their role and that ongoing training and development matching individual and organisational requirements is available and encouraged; ➢ 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 update their knowledge on a continuing basis; and ➢ ensuring personal, organisational and system-wide development through shared learning, including lessons learnt from governance weaknesses both internal and external. ▪ Ensure that there are structures in place to encourage public participation; ▪ Take steps to consider the leadership's own effectiveness and ensure leaders are open to constructive feedback from peer review and inspections; ▪ Hold staff to account through regular performance reviews which take account of training or development needs; and ▪ Ensure arrangements are in place to maintain the health and wellbeing of the workforce and support individuals in maintaining their own physical and mental wellbeing.
(F) Managing risks and performance through financial management	Managing Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognise that risk management is an integral part of all activities and must be considered in all aspects of decision making; ▪ Implement robust and integrated risk management arrangements and ensure that they are working effectively; and ▪ Ensure that responsibilities for managing individual risks are clearly allocated.
	Managing Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitor service delivery effectively including planning, specification, execution and independent post implementation review; ▪ Make decisions based on relevant, clear objective analysis and advice pointing out the implications and risks inherent in the Council's financial, social and environmental position and outlook; ▪ Ensure an effective scrutiny or oversight function is in place which encourages constructive challenge and debate on policies and objectives before, during and after decisions are made thereby enhancing the Council's performance and that of any organisation for which it is responsible; ▪ Provide Members and senior management with regular reports on service delivery plans and on progress towards outcome achievement; and ▪ Ensure there is consistency between specification stages (such as budgets) and post implementation reporting (e.g. financial statements).
	Robust internal control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Align the risk management strategy and policies on internal control with achieving objectives; ▪ Evaluate and monitor the Council's risk management and internal control arrangements on a regular basis; ▪ Ensure effective counter fraud and anti-corruption arrangements are in place; ▪ Ensure additional assurance on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the framework of governance, risk management and control is provided by the internal auditor; ▪ Ensure an Audit and Governance Committee which is independent of the executive and accountable to the Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ provides a further source of effective assurance regarding arrangements for managing risk and maintaining an effective control environment; and ➢ that its recommendations are listened to and acted upon.

Principle	Sub Principles	Council Actions and Behaviours
(F) Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management	Managing Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure effective arrangements are in place for the safe collection, storage, use and sharing of data, including processes to safeguard personal data; ▪ Ensure effective arrangements are in place and operating effectively when sharing data with other bodies; and ▪ Review and audit regularly the quality and accuracy of data used in decision making and performance monitoring;
	Strong public financial management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure financial management supports both long-term achievement of outcomes and short-term financial and operational performance; and ▪ Ensure well –developed financial management is integrated at all levels of planning and control, including management of financial risks and controls.
(G) Implementing good practices in transparency, accountability	Implementing good practice in transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Write and communicate reports for the public and other stakeholders in a fair, balanced, and understandable style appropriate to the intended audience ensuring that they are easy to access and interrogate; and ▪ Strike 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.
	Implementing good practices in reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Report at least annually on performance, value for money and the stewardship of its resources to stakeholders in a timely and understandable way; ▪ Ensure Members and senior management own the results; ▪ Ensure robust arrangements for assessing the extent to which the principles contained in this Framework have been applied and publish the results on this assessment including an action plan for improvement and evidence to demonstrate good governance (Annual Governance Statement); ▪ Ensure that the Framework is applied to jointly managed or shared service organisations as appropriate; and ▪ Ensure 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.
	Assurance accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure that recommendations for corrective action made by external audit are acted upon; ▪ Ensure an effective internal audit service with direct access to Members is in place which provides assurance with regard to governance arrangements and that recommendations are acted upon; ▪ Welcome peer challenge, reviews and inspections from regulatory bodies and implement recommendations; ▪ Gain assurance on risks associated with delivering services through third parties and evidence this in the annual governance statement; and ▪ Ensure that when working in partnership, arrangements for accountability are clear and that the need for wider public accountability has been recognised and met.

Appendix B – Oxfordshire County Council’s Evidence of Good Governance

Core Principles	(A) Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law	(B) Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement	(C) Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits	(D) Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes	(E) Developing the Council’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it	(F) Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management	(G) Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability
Evidence of Good Governance	The Constitution	Strategic Plan 2022-25	Cabinet Reports	Delivering the Future Together (DTFT) Board	The Constitution	The Constitution Scheme of Delegation	Audit and Governance Committee, Terms of Reference
	Schemes of Delegation / Decision making protocols	Decision Making Protocols Oxfordshire County Council website – Key Decisions	Strategic Plan 2022-25	Budget Consultations – Reported to Cabinet	Protocol on Members’ Rights and Responsibilities Constitution – Opposition rights	Audit and Governance Committee, Corporate Governance Assurance	Scrutiny Committee/Framework
	Audit & Governance Committee / Terms of Reference	Annual Statement of Accounts/ Annual Governance Statement	Scrutiny Committees	Stakeholder Engagement	Member Induction/Development Programme	Scrutiny Committee/Framework Cabinet Report	Decision Making Protocols
	Scrutiny Committees Standards Committee Terms of Reference	Health Improvement Partnership Board; Future Oxfordshire Partnership (formerly the Oxfordshire Growth Board)	Oxfordshire Vision for Long-Term Sustainable Development; Shared regional principles for protecting, restoring and enhancing the environment	Business Cases including options appraisals	Workforce Planning Toolkit	Pension Fund Committee / Pensions Benefit Sub Committee Monthly Business Management and Monitoring reports	External audit of accounts and VFM opinion
	Financial Procedure Rules / Financial Regulations / Contract Procedure Rules Ethical Procurement Policy Statement	Public Meetings		Director of Finance statement, section 25 of the Local Government Finance Act 2003	Chief Executive Appraisal Process Leadership / Management Development Programmes	Financial Procedure Rules / Financial Regulations / Contract Procedure Rules Business and Budget Planning Process	Annual Statement of Accounts
	Statutory Officer roles: Head of Paid Service (Chief executive), Director of Finance, Monitoring Officer, Chief Internal Auditor <u>mandate/Internal</u>	Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees	Business Cases / Options Appraisals to support decision making	Business and Budget Planning Process; Monthly Business Management Reporting	12:3:2 / 1-2-1 programmes – managing for performance, Managing for Performance Framework Organisational Development Programme	External audit of accounts and Value For Money (VFM) opinion/ statement of accounts/ medium term financial strategy / Internal Audit	Annual Governance Statement Corporate Governance Assurance Framework
	Members’ and Officers’ Codes of Conduct, LGA Model Code of Member conduct	Annual Budget Consultation Engagement Toolkit Annual Residents Survey	Business and Budget Planning process, including Service Plans	Medium Term Financial Strategy	Annual Monitoring Officer’s Report Annual Governance Statement	Financial Management Code of Practice Annual Compliance review; Internal Audit, Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) external assessment	Chief Internal Auditors Annual Opinion / Report
	Member/Officer Induction Programme Members’/Officers’ Register of Interest	Co-production Programme	Social Value Policy	Business Continuity Plans Contingency Planning Local Resilience Forum	Benchmarking Local Government Association Peer Review Internally led reviews / independent challenge External Reviews	Data Protection and Information Security Incident Policy Information asset registers Data Protection Training Information Governance Board/Group Privacy Assessments	Internal Audit Service Children’s Social Care Annual Report
	Delivering the Future Together programme Protocol on Member Officer relations	Joint Strategic Needs Assessment	Risk & Opportunities Management Strategy Risk Registers	Risk & Opportunities Management Strategy	Health and Safety Governance Framework and policies Wellbeing advice Coronavirus support and advice Employee assistance	Risk & Opportunities Management Strategy Risk Management Framework Risk Based Internal Auditing Service / planning	Business and Budget Planning process / Monthly Business Management Reporting
	Counter Fraud Strategy	Joint performance risk and finance reporting		Annual Service Delivery Plans	Mentoring Opportunities	Strategic Risk Register Leadership Risk Register	Transparency Code

Anti-Bribery and Anti-Money Laundering Policies	Transparency Code	Monthly Business Management reports	Social Value Policy	Delivering the Future Together (DTFT) Board	Chief Internal Auditors Annual Opinion / Report Annual Governance	Oxfordshire County Council Website
Whistleblowing policy Transparency Code	Corporate and Statutory Complaints Procedures	Transparency Code	Decision Making Protocols	Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	Monthly Performance, Risk and Financial Reports	Freedom of Information Publication Scheme
Risk & Opportunities Strategy	Freedom of Information Publication Scheme	Equality Diversity and Inclusion Framework, Equality and Climate Impact Assessments		Scheme of Delegation	Counter Fraud Strategy Anti-Bribery and Anti-Money Laundering Policies	Corporate and Statutory Complaints Procedures
Embedded organisational values through network of 190 Delivering the Future Embedded organisational values through network of 190 Delivering the Future Together Champions.	Consultation and Engagement Strategy 2022-25 and accompanying best practice guidance	Strategy, monitoring and reporting	Monitoring and reporting against key policies, policy review	Succession planning and talent management to manage current and future risks of key personnel together with opportunities for individual growth and promotion. (An employer of choice)	Business Continuity Plans Contingency Planning Local Resilience Forum	Unacceptable Behaviour Policy
Procurement Strategy	Project Initiation Document, Stakeholder Mapping	Programme led delivery, benefits realisation, monitoring, reporting, evaluation and review	Programme and project management	Recruitment and retention	Established and effective systems and processes for managing employee relations	Job Descriptions Job Evaluation Shortlisting, Interview and Recruitment
Customer Service Standards	Website and all communications			Apprenticeships	Procurement Strategy	Business management and monitoring report
Mandatory e-learning induction modules	Available in alternative languages, formats eg audio, braille			IT & Digital	Strategic Capital Boards	Robust Directorate Leadership Team agenda
Planning and Regulation Committee	Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2022-2027			Agile working	Business management and monitoring report	
Climate Action Programme Board				Service and performance review		
Cabinet and full Council decision-making				Senior Managers Forum		