

To: Audit and Governance Committee
Date: 29 October 2024
Report of: Head of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)
Title of Report: 2023/2024 Annual Governance Statement

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present the 2023/2024 Annual Governance Statement for approval. To present the refreshed Code of Corporate Governance for approval.
Recommendation(s): That the Audit & Governance Committee resolves to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. APPROVE the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/2024; 2. APPROVE the new Code of Corporate Governance; 3. NOTE the action plan appended to the Annual Governance Statement and that progress will be reported on in 2025; and 4. DELEGATE authority to the Head of Law & Governance to make any typographical changes to the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 or the Code of Corporate Governance that may be required before publication on the Council's website. 	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Annual Governance Statement 2023/2024
Appendix 2	Code of Corporate Governance
Appendix 3	The LGA's Councillors Guide: Improvement and Assurance Framework for Local Government [link]
Appendix 4	The LGA's Improvement and Assurance Framework [link]

Introduction and background

1. Each year the Council must produce a statement evaluating its governance and effectiveness. This is done considering the year against the Code of Corporate Governance.
2. The Council's Code of Corporate Governance has also not been reviewed for some time and therefore a review has been undertaken.
3. There is a stronger focus on the governance of Local Authorities following on from high profile failings which have been underpinned by poor governance

arrangements and practices elsewhere in the Country. This has resulted in the LGA producing a new Assurance Framework, and associated guidance (see appendices 3 and 4).

Code of Corporate Governance Refresh

4. The Council's current Code of Corporate Governance ("the Code") was not based around the principles defined by CIPFA and SOLACE in the "Delivering Good Governance Local Government Framework". As such the refresh has been based on bringing it in line with the best practice for codes aligning with the principles.
5. The refreshed Code has been designed around the principles and also sets out the key policies, procedures and bodies that form part of the system of ensuring the Council has strong, robust and effective governance arrangements.
6. The Council governance is set out in many documents (policies, procedures, protocols, the constitution, schemes of delegation etc). The Code of Governance pulls them together and explains what the Council will do to ensure good governance is practiced throughout the Council and in all it does.
7. Governance is defined by CIPFA and SOLACE as 'the arrangements put in place to ensure that the intended outcomes for stakeholders are defined and achieved'. Good governance helps deliver the outcomes desired by an organisation.
8. The refreshed Code of Corporate Governance is in line with good practice guidance, including the principles that underpin it.
9. It will, subject to approval, form part of the Council's control environment assurance arrangements.
10. The revised Code brings together an underlying set of values, legislative requirements, governance principles and management processes that enable effective outcomes, setting the framework for the Council to ensure that it operates in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively.
11. The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive are accountable for ensuring good governance in their authority and sign the Annual Governance Statement on behalf of the Council.
12. All services are responsible for maintaining proportionate but sound operational procedures and processes that adequately mitigate risks that may result in a service failure or the failure to deliver service objectives. Application of the framework outlined should put the Council in a strong position to successfully deliver whatever services it chooses to.

Annual Governance Statement Refresh

13. The Annual Governance Statement ("the AGS") is a statutory requirement (Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015) for local authorities.
14. As an annual report it is published with the Council's financial statements and its purpose is to describe the effectiveness of the council's overall governance arrangements. It should also provide an action plan to improve them.

15. The AGS needs to consider whether there is sufficient evidence to show that the Corporate Code of Governance is appropriately and consistently implemented. Where it is not, the AGS needs to propose actions to address this in the coming year. Improvements are not a suggestion that the Council is doing things incorrectly but a signal of good self-reflection and challenge, to strive to do better in its governance and assurance.
16. It is a corporate document. Though typically produced by the Monitoring Officer it reflects the corporate approach to governance by all departments considering the Code of Corporate Governance.
17. In the LGA Assurance Framework at Appendix 3 the roles of the Organisation around good governance and the AGS sets out the following as best practice:
 - **Operational directors** ensure that directorate assurance statements to inform the annual governance statement are comprehensive and accurate, informed by an assessment of compliance with all relevant policies and procedures.
 - **The strategic management team** effectively oversees operational and strategic delivery, including contributing to the review of the effectiveness of the authority's governance arrangements to inform the Annual Governance Statement.
 - **The Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive)** ensures that an appropriate person leads the review of the effectiveness of the authority's governance arrangements to inform the Annual Governance Statement.
 - **Audit and Governance Committee** (as the relevant committee of OCC):
 - reviews the draft Annual Governance Statement.
 - reviews, challenges, and approves the annual governance statement and holds management (via the chief executive and lead member as signatories) to account for implementation of improvement actions identified.
 - **A whole-council approach:** assurance isn't just the responsibility of the Monitoring Officer or the Head of Internal Audit. All members have a responsibility to oversee effective governance, and all officers have a duty to comply with good governance and provide information to demonstrate that compliance. Everyone should understand their contribution – and this may include partners and other stakeholders. The opportunity provided by the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement to step back and consider how well the authority's systems and controls are working as a whole, is a crucial one: depending on the scale of challenges and risks the authority is facing, the corporate statutory officers and/or audit committee may need to find other opportunities to do so at intervals during the year.

18. For 2023/2024 the format of the AGS has been refreshed and redesigned to reflect the new Code of Corporate Governance and to increase its effectiveness for the Council in reviewing its governance processes and arrangements and their use. The template has been developed that:

- puts a focus on outcomes and value for money.
- evaluates against the local code and principles.
- is written openly and in an easy-to-read way.
- includes a conclusion on whether arrangements are fit for purpose.
- identifies significant governance issues and produces an action plan to address them.
- explains action taken in the year to address any significant governance issues identified in the previous year's statement (though note, this will be difficult to do based on the last AGS) and
- is signed and endorsed by the Leader and Chief Executive.

Annual Governance Statement 2023/2024

19. The preparation of the Annual Governance Statement (“the AGS”), to support the Annual Statement of Accounts, is a statutory requirement (Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015) for local authorities. Its purpose is to demonstrate and evidence that there is a continuous review of the control environment - the effectiveness of the Council’s internal control, performance, and risk management systems. This allows an assurance on their effectiveness to be provided so that users of the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts can be satisfied that proper arrangements are in place to govern spending and safeguard assets. The process also enables the production of a corporate action plan to address any identified weaknesses.
20. The AGS also explains what governance challenges the Council is facing and how it is addressing those challenges and seeking improvement in how its functions are exercised. As part of the process of identifying issues self-assessment information is collated for all Service Areas through annual governance questionnaires. The responses to the questionnaires are analysed to identify recurring governance challenges.
21. Overall, the Annual Report from the Council’s internal auditors provides that moderate assurance can be given that there is a sound system of internal control, designed to meet the Council’s objectives and controls are being applied consistently.
22. The Committee is required to consider and, if satisfied, approve the AGS. The AGS forms part of the Council’s Statement of Accounts and is attached to the report as Appendix 1.

Financial implications

23. There are no financial implications arising directly from the report.

Legal issues

24. Regulation 6(1)(a) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 requires an authority to conduct a review at least once in a year of the effectiveness of its systems of internal control and include a statement reporting on the review with any published Statement of Accounts. The Annual Governance Statement explains how Oxford City Council meets this requirement.

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OXFORD
CITY COUNCIL

**Annual Governance
Statement**

2023 – 2024

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Executive Summary

Oxford City Council is committed to making Oxford a great place in which to live and work, supporting our communities. Our policies will address the climate emergency, and build a fairer, greener city in which everyone can thrive. These commitments are set out in the Council Strategy that establishes four interconnected priorities and how we will work to achieve them in a joined-up way.

The fifth priority and commitment in our Council Strategy is to be a “well-run council” reflecting our understanding that the foundation for the success of the Council is in good governance and sound financial management. The Annual Governance Statement is one of the key documents that ensures we are doing things in the right way and in line with our values.

This Statement incorporates the continuous review of the effectiveness of our governance arrangements throughout 2023/24. Identifying those areas where the Council has identified opportunities for improvement it will make certain that we have the proper governance arrangements to ensure that the Council delivers on its commitments in its Council Strategy.

Throughout the year, the Council’s governance framework is continuously reviewed to ensure that the arrangements remain effective and to improve and streamline as needed. In reviewing the effectiveness of the Council’s governance framework, the commitments detailed within the Corporate Code of Corporate Governance (Appendix 1) are assessed, which is consistent with the principles of the 2016 CIPFA/Solace document, ‘Delivering Good Governance in Local Government’. This Annual Governance Statement has been prepared with reference to both.

The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive both recognise the importance of having good governance and sound financial management and provide their support and endorsement to the matters set out in this Statement, to further enhance and ensure the delivery of our Council Strategy.

The Leader and Chief Executive confirm they have been advised of the implications of the review by the Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer, other senior management as well as the Audit & Governance Committee and are satisfied that the steps outlined in this document will ensure the governance arrangements in place are robust and fit for the future.

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council

Caroline Green, Chief Executive

Review of the Effectiveness of the Council's Governance Framework

1. Introduction

The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 (“the Regulations”) require that:

- The Council must conduct a review, at least once a year, of the effectiveness of its system of internal control;
- Findings of this review should be considered by the Council;
- The Council must approve an Annual Governance Statement; and
- The Annual Governance Statement must accompany the Statement of Accounts.

This statement is guided by CIPFA Bulletin 06 Application of the Good Governance Framework and describes the Council's governance framework, the steps taken to ensure that it is effective and establishes key actions that will be put in place to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of its arrangements.

Governance arrangements are reviewed and informed by senior officers, management, internal and external audit and review agencies. There is also strong corporate and political ownership and oversight, including through the Council's Statutory Officers.

Similar and proportionate oversight and governance arrangements apply to the Council's outsourced services, trading partnerships, shared service arrangements and arm's length bodies. Following a review in 2023/2024 against Local Partnerships LATCo guidance work is in progress to strengthen these arrangements.

2. Governance Framework

The Council's Code of Corporate Governance sets out the principles the Council commits itself to in terms of its corporate governance arrangements and the steps it will take to enact them. They reflect the CIPFA/SoLACE Delivering Good Governance publication (2016) which defined the 7 core principles of good governance in the public sector:



The Council's Code of Corporate Governance is delivered via the Council's governance framework. The governance framework comprises the rules, systems, processes, cultures and values by which the authority is directed and controlled and various routes through which it accounts.

3. LGA Peer Review 2023

The Council invited in a Local Government Association (LGA) team to conduct a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) review in July 2023. This was the first peer review the Council has undertaken for eight years, and its purpose was to assess the work of the Council, ODSL and OCHL), and gather an independent view from those running other councils on where the Council is doing well and where and how it might be able to improve.

The CPC recognised that the Council is ambitious with a successful track record of delivery. It highlighted the Council's leading practice in several areas, notably on its net zero programme. [The CPC feedback report can be found on the Council's website.](#)

In response to the findings, the Council started work early to develop an Action Plan ("the Plan"). [The Plan can be found here on the website.](#) Many of the LGA's recommendations were included in the Council Strategy 2024 to 2028.

A Progress Review ("the Review") was conducted in April 2024 to update the LGA Peer Team on progress made against the Plan and the LGA Peer Team recommendations. To help the Peer Team gain an understanding of the local issues before the review, the Council provided a short position statement and other relevant documents.

Following the Review, the LGA provided a short feedback report reflecting the Council's progress. [The Progress Review can be found here on the website.](#) feedback report Appendix. The Peer Teams feedback stated, "Oxford City Council is a particularly ambitious district Council, one which is performing well."

4. Cyber Security

A key element of good governance is having effective arrangements in place for the safe storage, use and sharing of data. Cybercrime continues to grow in intensity fuelled by the global political tensions that have continued over the last year. The Council's ongoing programme of activity to reduce cyber risk has progressed well with training being deployed to staff at the Council, the wholly owned companies and councillors. This will continue to be delivered in line with the accepted audit recommendations.

5. Information Governance

Our FOI Team ("the Team") has been built on a comprehensive transformation initiative which had the primary goal of enhancing the efficiency of processes within the FOI function. The overarching objective was to elevate our on-time response rate by addressing inefficiencies that had previously hindered our performance.

The transformation initiative focused on process improvement, enhanced documentation, and the introduction of new technology to centralise our cases. Notable changes included the introduction of new email and document templates, expediting response creation times. Workbasket filters were implemented to facilitate team workload prioritisation, while automatic reminders were introduced to minimise the need for manual follow-ups on contribution requests.

Additionally, a new disclosure log aimed at enhancing citizen experience and reducing FOI requests was implemented. The performance of the Team in terms of the timeliness of responses to FOI requests is published on the Council's website.

As a result of these changes, significant improvements were achieved:

- Timeliness rates surged as a result and were maintained over the course of the year despite an increase in the volume of requests received over the course of the year.
- Time spent on sending out contribution requests to colleagues was halved.
- The volume of contributions requiring follow-up further decreased.

The Team also rolled out and promoted a new FOI training module to everyone in the organisation and implemented a refreshed Freedom of Information Policy.

Data Protection Audits are being conducted on each service area across the Council in 2024 to ensure best practice and identify improvements where needed. This will then follow with a corporate review of key aspects such as retention policies and records of processing.

In terms of corporate performance on Information Governance In 2023/2024:

FOIA/EIR

- We received 926 FOIA/EIR requests, an average of 77 a month.
- 49 of the requests were subject to an internal review.
- 5 of the requests were referred to the Information Commissioners Officer.

Data Protection

- There were 27 data incidents/breaches (two of which were serious enough to be referred to the ICO).
- The Council had 124 Data Subject Access Requests.
- Only one Data Subject Access Request was subject to an internal review.

6. Health and Safety

New governance arrangements have been set up to improve the oversight and monitoring of health and safety management and key performance indicators. The health and safety policy and associated standards have been reviewed and updated, new e-learning has been launched and personal safety training and support has been improved.

This has led to the creation of focused boards to review specified aspects of health and safety. Quarterly reporting to the Corporate Management Team (“the CMT”) has been established to ensure corporate oversight.

7. Housing – Temporary Accommodation, HRA and compliance with the Social Housing Act

Oxford City Council, along with other local housing authorities, has faced a number of major challenges that are impacting the operations and governance of our housing services - in particular our homelessness management as a result of escalating housing needs and supply shortages, and our tenancy and housing maintenance functions as a result of new regulatory requirements that prioritises tenants' voices and the health and safety of our social housing stock.

In response to this the Council has undertaken a comprehensive review of our housing functions, operations and governance. This has resulted in the preparation of a new Homelessness and Tenancy Management programme; Housing Revenue Account (“HRA”) 30 Year Business Plan; HRA Asset Management Strategy; HRA 5-Year Investment Programme and commissioning and clienting arrangements; revised compliance monitoring, reporting and governance arrangements; and full review of our tenancy and housing management services including enhanced tenant engagement arrangements. Ensuring that our housing services are compliant with the requirements of the new Social Housing Act has underpinned our future service designs, which is why we also volunteered to pilot the Regulator for Social Housing Inspection regime at the start of the year.

Over the coming year the Council will be implementing our comprehensive action plans for transforming the organisation, operation and governance of our housing services, and for attaining Social Housing Act compliance.

8. Procurement

A Procurement Board (“the Board”) has been established as a platform/forum for sharing, learning, and collaborating amongst procurement, commercial and commissioning professionals who are subject to the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and who will be subjected to the new procurement regime – Public Procurement Act 2023 (Public Procurement Regulations 2024).

The Council needs to ensure it has adequately prepared for the introduction of the new Procurement Act 2023, due to commence in 2025. This will introduce changes to requirements placed on public sector buyers, including greater requirements to publish information about procurement and contract-related decisions.

The Board’s purpose is to enhance procurement capability through peer support, by ensuring that new best practice is created and shared, challenges are discussed, and trends and risks are identified and addressed.

The main objectives of the Procurement Board are to:

- Create a community of procurement and commissioning professionals to help enhance procurement capabilities and maximise the procurement opportunities under the new regime;
- Support the Council's existing Procurement Team by ensuring that procurement is undertaken in the correct way first time reducing the burden of unnecessary exemption requests and re-tendering;
- Support the capturing of information related to Social Value, Modern Slavery, Local, VCSE and SME Contracts, along with poor supplier performance;
- Create a platform for peer support and the creation and sharing of best practice.
- Discuss and identify trends, challenges, and risks in procurement procedures.
- Encourage procurement, commercial and commissioning professionals to apply best practices using the new regime;
- Identify opportunities for continuous improvement in procurement best practice within the Council or sector or region;
- Communicate changes to the Council's Contract Rules in Part 19 of the Constitution;
- Communicate changes published in Public Procurement Notices (PPN's); and
- Capture lessons learnt from past procurements and ensure that they are applied to new procurements.

9. Council Owned Companies

The Council has three wholly owned companies, Oxford Direct Services Limited (ODSL), Oxford Direct Trading Services Limited (ODSTL) and Oxford City Housing Limited (OCHL).

OCHL has two wholly owned subsidiaries, Oxford City Housing Development Limited (OCH(D)L) and Oxford City Housing Investment Limited (OCH(I)L), trading as OX Place.

In addition, the Council has a 50% share in the joint venture entities, Oxford West End Development Limited and Barton LLP.

Governance arrangements are in place for the companies and the Council as Shareholder, with a combined scrutiny and shareholder meeting (SHJVG), shareholder oversight and approval of business plans and progress reports. Non-Executive Directors were for each company, appointed against a job description which sought to secure Board Members with appropriate skill sets for the nature of the particular entity. The Shareholder role is performed by the members of the Cabinet collectively.

In light of the Local Partnerships Local Authority Company Review Guidance 2023 a review has commenced and will be developed in conjunction with the new Chair of ODSL/ODSTL, in relation to the Council and the companies' governance arrangements and documents concerning the operation of the entities. This is ongoing, the first stage concerning Council governance is almost complete.

Other areas of practice, whilst adequate, have been identified for improvement with a work plan in draft for the financial year 2024/2025. The areas of focus are as follows:

	At present	Improvements planned / in progress 2024/2025
Scrutiny Function	<p>Scrutiny was only operating at the meeting of the Shareholder.</p> <p>There was no space for pre-decision or call-in scrutiny regarding the Council's shareholding and shareholder decision making.</p> <p>There was also no scope for the Shareholder to have discussions without scrutiny in attendance on sensitive matters where there is no decision making.</p> <p>Scrutiny Committee has now agreed that the finance panel will look at forthcoming decisions of the shareholder and call in / scrutinise pre decision as it considers appropriate.</p>	<p>The terms of Reference for the SHJVG will be amended so that: in line with best practice there will be a standing invitation for scrutiny attendance at the meetings;</p> <p>The standing invite can be removed as needed to allow for private discussion; and</p> <p>amendments to internal processes will be made to ensure that decisions heading to SHJVG will be on the forward plan in line with all other executive decisions.</p>
Intelligent Client	<p>The Council has a light touch approach to clienting, which is historic from when the entities were established.</p> <p>This has presented some questions this year in terms of issues that have arisen in the services provided to the Council. This has led to the need for a review.</p> <p>Arrangements have been strengthened this year in relation to works contracts that the Council has with ODSL to ensure robust oversight of the CDM compliance by the Council and ODSL.</p>	<p>A clienting review and, in time, review of the contractual arrangements is underway. This will establish a framework for intelligent clienting, specifically, to enable challenge of the entity, holding it to account using performance data to ensure there is clarity about what is being provided for the Council and whether it meets expectations.</p> <p>Reviews of specifications of services will take place to ensure they are up to date and detailed. This will then feed in to updating agreements between the Council and the companies.</p>
Company Governance Documentation	<p>The Council has in place shareholder agreements with each entity that set out matters reserved to the Council as shareholder,</p>	<p>In line with best practice these documents should be reviewed regularly. There has not been a review of either since the establishment of the companies</p>

	<p>including things such as Non-Executive Director (NED) appointments.</p> <p>The companies have adopted articles which are broadly the same across the entities.</p>	<p>in 2016.</p> <p>There are elements of best practice that are not embedded in the agreement and articles.</p> <p>As part of the company governance review these will be amended, taken through Scrutiny and then a planned regular review will be agreed moving forward.</p>
<p>Statutory Officers</p>	<p>The statutory officers, or their representative, attend the SHJVG. The Monitoring Officer and S151 (or their deputy) advise the SHJVG at the meeting as required.</p> <p>The S151 and Monitoring Officer have pre-publication sight of reports via the Corporate Management Team.</p> <p>The S151 Officer provides commentary to the SHJVG on reports as part of the agenda pack.</p> <p>In line with best practice the Chief Executive meets with the Managing Director (or equivalent) and Chair of the Board of the Companies on a regular basis.</p>	<p>There has been a gap in the commentary of the Monitoring Officer on reports to SHJVG. This will be addressed with the commentary being a joint one of the Monitoring Officer and S151 moving forward.</p>
<p>Business Case</p>	<p>When creating an entity, a business case is produced and presented to the Cabinet. This will include detail on all the implications, responsibilities, risks and benefits of establishing the entity.</p> <p>No entity will be considered without a business case.</p> <p>Through the business case the Council has a clear understanding of what it wants to achieve by establishing an entity and is able to articulate clearly what</p>	<p>Best practice suggests that the business cases of each entity should be reviewed periodically. This has not been undertaken since the entities were established.</p> <p>It is proposed to review the business case for the entities, but this will tie in with other connected areas of work, such as the consideration of the structure of the housing group of companies.</p> <p>There will then need to be agreement on a regular basis for reviewing them moving</p>

	success looks like in terms of achieving social outcomes and a return on investment.	forward.
Conflict Management	<p>The Council ensures that no statutory officers are on the board of any entity.</p> <p>The Council and each entity has a code of conduct and policy on conflicts of interest.</p> <p>The selection of NEDs from officers in the Council will be done regarding their responsibilities in post and the possibility of a conflict arising.</p>	<p>Training should be arranged on a regular basis for all NEDs on directors' duties and conflicts of interest.</p> <p>Guidance should be produced for council officers specifically in relation to interaction with the Council's companies and conflicts of interest.</p> <p>This should be mirrored in the entities.</p>
Board performance	<p>The Council has an updated Job Description for its NEDs as of 2024. This has been used in the latest round of recruitment. It reflects the skills and qualities needed for an effective NED of the Council's companies.</p> <p>There are regular 121's and performance reviews with the Chairs of the relevant Board.</p>	<p>The composition of each Board should be considered in light of the best practice, which recommends a minimum of 50% NEDs (not including the Chair).</p>

10. Statutory Assurances and Controls

Head of Paid Service

The Chief Executive, as the Head of Paid Service, is responsible for the overall corporate and operational management of the Council. These responsibilities have been considered within the context of this Statement and the Chief Executive can confirm that proper arrangements have been put in place for the overall operation and management of the Council.

The Chief Executive has no significant concerns to report and continues to evolve the senior management structure and organisational strategy to align responsibilities and resources to deliver the Council's ambitions and priorities.

S151 Officer

The Chief Finance Officer is responsible for the development and maintenance of the Council's financial, risk, and control framework, ensuring lawfulness and financial prudence of decision making and the administration of financial affairs, in accordance with Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972.

These responsibilities have been considered within the context of this Statement and the Chief Finance Officer can confirm that the Council's arrangements conform to Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 and that the Council complies with the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) in Local Government (2016).

Appropriate levels of financial management and financial control are maintained by the Section 151 Officer through regular meetings between the accounting staff within the Financial Services Team and service managers and the adherence to financial processes and systems. The Council had a balanced Medium Term Financial Plan when it last reviewed this in February 2024 and an adequate level of reserves and working balances. Overspends in 2023-24 and the current year in relation to the cost of homelessness do give cause for concern although the authority is seeking to address this in the next refresh of the MTFP.

Monitoring Officer

The Monitoring Officer is required to report to the Council in any case where it appears that any proposal, decision, or omission by the authority has given rise to or is likely to or would give rise to any contravention of any enactment, rule of law or code of practice or maladministration or injustice in accordance with Sections 5 and 5A of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989; (LGHA 89).

These responsibilities have been considered within the context of this Statement and the Monitoring Officer has no significant concerns to report for the period 2023/2024.

The Monitoring Officer has reported to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) on two occasions a data breach, against which no further action has been taken by the ICO. Learning and improvements have been implemented because of each, within the relevant department and corporately.

The Monitoring Officer also has no significant concerns regarding overall Member conduct. Training sessions have been held during the year for Members of the Council. There has continued to be a relatively low number of complaints alleging a breach of the Member Code of Conduct during the past year which have all been dealt with in accordance with the Council's adopted procedures for handling such complaints.

The Monitoring Officer also considers that the Council has an effective Standards Committee in place which continues to report to the full Council annually on the work it has undertaken during the year and to provide the Council with assurance.

Opinion of Internal Audit

*" Overall, we provide **moderate** assurance that there is a sound system of internal control designed to meet the Council's objectives and that controls are being applied consistently. However, some weakness in the design and/or inconsistent application of controls, put the achievement of particular objectives at risk. In forming our view we have taken into account that:*

- *The Council reported the final outturn position a surplus of £3.903 million against the balanced budget agreed in February 2023. This outturn surplus was recommended to be transferred to the risk reserve, as the Council has become aware of substantial risks arising in the course of this financial year, notably from increased temporary accommodation spend.*
- *The Council have not implemented all recommendations due for 2021-22, a total of five medium priority recommendations remain outstanding for the Environment Audit. However, significant progress has been made against each recommendation and we anticipate these to be completed by September 2024. Recommendations raised in 2022-23 have been completed apart from three high recommendations for Income Generation which are due to a new Asset Management system being implemented. The revised due dates for these recommendations have been agreed with management for September 2025.*
- *Our reports this year contained an opinion, including five with moderate assurance over design and effectiveness (Recruitment and Retention, Building Control, Selective Licensing, Data Analytics Planned Maintenance and Refurbishment) and three with a substantial assurance on control design and moderate assurance on control effectiveness (Planning Services, Empty Properties and Dwellings and Accounts Receivable). In comparison to last year there were two reports which contained substantial assurance over design effectiveness (Car Parking and Treasury Management) and two with limited assurance on both design and effectiveness (Income Generation and IT Audit). Overall, there has been a positive change on the control environment where no limited assurance opinions were issued despite the Council continuing to point us to high-risk areas. We are therefore comfortable in providing moderate assurance overall.*
- *The Council needs to achieve substantial assurance on both design and effectiveness on most of their audit reviews in 2024-25 to achieve a substantial opinion overall.”*

11. Review of Effectiveness

The Council has a legal responsibility to conduct an annual review of the effectiveness of its governance framework, including the systems of internal control. After conducting this review, the Council has assurance that its governance arrangements and systems of control are robust and reflect the principles of the Code of Corporate Governance.

There is a clear separation of powers within the Council between the Leader and the Cabinet (the Executive) and the full Council. Both entities have a number of sub-groups and Committees, as set out above.

Overall the Council is satisfied it has robust internal controls in place, good governance practices and is assured that the Code of Corporate Governance is working effectively.

Overall rating*	Strengths	What needs attention
Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law		
20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrable consistent implementation and use of the Code of Conduct for members • Code of Conduct training undertaken by all councillors post May elections • Changes made to the scrutiny and recording of key decisions of the Shareholder and Joint Venture group to ensure compliance with the law and constitution around Executive decision making • A refresh of the Contract Rules in anticipation of the legislative change under the Procurement Act 2023 has is progressing. • In 2023/2024 only one Code of Conduct complaint was received against a Councillor, which was not upheld. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There needs to be guidance and clarity provided within the organisation on who can seal and sign due to some agreements being incorrectly and ineffectively signed. • With the amendment to the Contract Rules there is a need to develop a section specifically outlining property and grants rules and these will be removed from the Contract Rules as it is not the right place for them. • The Governance review of the wholly owned companies will be completed. • The process for officer declaration of gifts, hospitality and conflicts of interests needs to be reviewed in terms of where and how matters are registered by staff • A review of the arrangements for dealing with Standards will be carried out • Recruitment of Independent Persons to be undertaken due to the fact the present ones have reached the end of their term
	Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilisation of the Council's online Residents' Panel - a group of c900 residents providing feedback on various topics, including the Council's current work, services, and broader issues. The independently-managed panel is broadly representative of the population to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work will be done to build on the Council's approach to involving tenants to ensure full alignment with best practice under the new Social Housing Regulator.

ensure diverse voices are heard.

- The Council is involved in a number of active strategic partnerships working together at all levels – from large anchor institutions to small community groups.

Including:

- Oxford Strategic Partnership
- Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership
- Future Oxfordshire Partnership
- Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing and Health Improvement Boards
- Oxfordshire Children’s Trust Board
- Oxford Youth Partnership Board
- Oxfordshire Strategic Schools Partnership
- Oxford Localities Forum Meetings
- Oxford Community Safety Partnership
- Fast Growth Cities Group
- Oxford to Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership
- Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Partnership
- Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership
- Oxford Economic Growth Steering Group
- University and Innovation Partnerships
- Councillor representation on community groups
- District Councils Network
- Local Government Association
- The Council invited in a Local Government Association (LGA) team to conduct a Corporate Peer Review (CPC) in July 2023, followed by a progress review in April 2024.

Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefit

- The Council’s Strategy sets out objectives and

- There will be a review and refinement of the

outcomes and outlines the planned work against five priorities:

- o Good, affordable homes
- o Strong, fair economy
- o Thriving Communities
- o Zero Carbon Oxford City Council.
- o Well Run Council
- The Council has a suite of 16 quantifiable corporate key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure delivery of the Council Strategy.
- In addition to these corporate KPIs, the Council sets c80 operational KPIs that are reviewed regularly by the Corporate Management Team. Many of these tracking operational metrics are reported as part of regular performance updates to Finance & Performance Scrutiny, the annual Business Plan and the budget process.
- The Council's People Strategy 2024, currently in development, will reinforce the corporate aims of putting the citizen at the heart of what we do as an entity.
- The Council has voluntarily adopted the Socio-Economic Duty to help:
 - o Reduce inequality
 - o Promote fairness
 - o Enhance inclusive decision making

existing policy and strategy development toolkit by April 2025.

- The People Strategy 2024 will be finalised and have as one of its objectives a focus on our desire to seek more opportunities to support out local communities and to utilise it to ensure the Council delivers on its social value commitments by looking for new ways for colleagues to support residents of Oxford whether through volunteering, procurement or recruitment.

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

- The Council's annual Business Plan sets out publicly its priority work programme activities for the year required to achieve the outcomes set out in the

- The Council's senior management structures will be restructured to streamline its leadership team, support greater

	<p>Council Strategy. An annual update report informs of progress that has been made in delivering the Business Plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council invited in a Local Government Association (LGA) team to conduct a Corporate Peer Review (CPC) in July 2023. In response to the findings, work started early to develop an Action Plan to help the Council keep up with the progress being made. • The Council has a strong policy framework with a robust schedule for developing, monitoring, and reporting policies and strategies to the CMT quarterly. Monthly horizon scanning highlights internal, county, and national policy and strategy developments 	<p>collaboration, efficiency and help sharpen focus on its strategic direction. The planned changes will also support greater delegation of operational decision-making at the right level and create opportunities for progression in the organisation.</p>
<p>Developing the entity's capacity including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it</p>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear standards are in place for managers and leaders across the organisation • Management development for 150 managers at all levels has been delivered to build a culture where high performance is both motivated and managed • The annual staff survey measures employee satisfaction with their immediate manager and the leadership of the authority • Opportunities for development through secondment is supported • An aspiring manager programme is designed to develop future leaders and is a positive action initiative to improve the diversity of colleagues in management and leadership roles • The Councillor Induction Programme was updated and expanded to include additional support on key 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council's senior management structures will be restructured to streamline its leadership team, support greater collaboration, efficiency and help sharpen focus on its strategic direction. The planned changes will also support greater delegation of operational decision-making at the right level and create opportunities for progression in the organisation. • Work will be undertaken to build capability for adoption of new technology and business transformation to drive efficiency and effectiveness • A review is taking place of councillor development and training both mandatory

	<p>issues affecting the Councillor role, as well as providing clarification on the expected standards of behaviour of councillors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our People Strategy is being refreshed for 2024 and takes into account the current challenges facing the Council, and sets objectives designed to build a high performing organisation that meets the needs of the community it serves. The People Strategy also aims to support the Council's planned work against its five priorities. 	<p>and non-mandatory. This will focus on providing councillors with the training needed to undertake their role and targeted where required particularly in relation to regulatory, corporate, wellbeing and safety priorities.</p>
<p>Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management</p>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A balanced medium term financial plan • Regular financial reporting to CMT and Members • Robust financial planning process with significant scrutiny from members • Regular risk monitoring and supported by a Risk Management Group • Oversight of the financial performance of companies • Operational and corporate KPIs dashboard regularly reviewed by CMT • Positive LGA peer review in relation to financial management • Regular review by Audit and Governance Committee of internal audit reports and the implementation of recommendations • Moderate internal audit assurance opinion from internal auditors i.e. no major weaknesses in the internal control systems • Unqualified external audit opinions on annual Statement of Accounts • The Corporate Management team undertook a piece of work to fundamentally review our corporate risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will be continued adherence to policies and procedures in order to ensure good financial management and internal control across the authority. • A review of operational KPIs underway with a view to refresh the reporting process and KPIs across the Council

	register to ensure it is strategic and cross-cutting.	
	Implementing good practices in transparency reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability	
25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislative requirements for meeting papers adhered • Clear policies on access to information for members • FOIA significantly improved with 97% of responses on time • Good practice in publishing officer / delegated decisions – though note improvement proposed. • Disclosure log now in place and updated with FOIA releases • Forward plan now included SHJVG matters • Scrutiny by members to ensure management are held to account to its electorate for the financial stewardship of funds and operation of processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Departmental schemes of delegation need to be in place and published internally for reference • There will be a review of and implementation of guidance on the grounds for papers to be exempting papers from publication to ensure there is a record of why and which exemption is applied • The officer executive decision form needs updating to ensure there is sufficient information within it and increased transparency around the decisions being taken. • A review is required of what officer decisions are published as some operational decisions are currently being published e.g. flag flying.

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	There are sound policies and processes in place which are working across services that provide for good governance arrangements and support compliance with the requirements of this principle and the achievement of the Council's aims and objectives. There may be minor areas for continuous improvement, but these do not represent a significant or material risk to the Council's overall governance framework.
	Whilst there are policies and processes in place, there are some areas which remain a challenge for the Council or require further improvement, which may impact the effectiveness of elements of the Council's Governance Arrangements, compliance with this principle and achievement of the Council's aims and objectives. The Council has in place an action plan to address challenges and improvement matters
	The Council has significant challenges in relation to the policies and processes which may impact the effectiveness of elements of the Council's Governance Arrangements, compliance with this principle and achievement of the Council's aims and objectives. We have implemented plans for corrective actions to manage these risks

Action Plan 24/25

Action to be taken	Lead Officer	Reporting / Monitoring
Adoption of the new Terms of Reference for SHJVG	Emma Jackman	SHJVG / CMT & A&G
Review of the Money Laundering Policy	Nigel Kennedy	A&G October 2024
Review of the Risk Management Strategy	Nigel Kennedy	Cabinet / CMT & A&G
Systems for recording of officer interests and gifts and hospitality	Gail Malkin	Cabinet / CMT & A&G
Each Service Area to develop and publish on the intranet their own scheme of delegation for powers flowing to them from Cabinet and/or Council	Each Head of Service	Cabinet / CMT & A&G
Roll-out of the new Duty Cover arrangements during out of hours.	Richard Adams	CMT
Complete CMT and Heads of Service training in Thames Valley LRF Emergency Response Arrangements.	Richard Adams	CMT
Review and refine the existing policy and strategy development toolkit by April 2025	Lucy Cherry	CMT
Implement our comprehensive action plans for transforming the organisation, operation and governance of our housing services, and for attaining Social Housing Act compliance	Nerys Parry	CMT
Continue to plan for the commencement of the Procurement Act through the Procurement Board and review of the Council's processes and procedures	Annette Osborne	CMT
Design, agree and roll out guidance documents for all processes under the new procurement Act	Annette Osborne	CMT
Design agree and roll out template documents for the tendering process (RFQ's, ITT's, Assessment summaries, evaluation matrices)	Annette Osborne	CMT
Deliver Contract Management Training	Annette Osborne	CMT
Complete the refresh of the Service KPI reporting and process	Mish Tullar	CMT
Build capability for adoption of new technology and business transformation to drive efficiency and effectiveness	Gail Malkin	CMT
The process for officer declaration of gifts, hospitality and conflicts of interests needs to be reviewed in terms of where and how things are registered by staff	Gail Malkin Annette Osborne Emma Jackman	CMT
Review of arrangements for dealing with Code of Conduct complaints	Emma Jackman	Standards Committee
Recruitment of Independent Persons for Code of Conduct complaints	Emma Jackman	Council

Review Councillor development and training	Jonathan Malton	Standards Committee
Review and launch the 2024 People Strategy	Gail Malkin	CMT
Senior Management Review	Caroline Green	
Constitutional Amendments		
Signature of Agreements and Contracts to be clarified in the Legal Rules for documents to be signed, including stating clear delegations	Emma Jackman	Council / CMT
Develop a section specifically outlining property and grants rules	Emma Jackman	Council / CMT
Refresh the Whistleblowing Policy	Emma Jackman	Council / CMT

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**OXFORD
CITY COUNCIL**

**Code of Corporate
Governance**

2024

Introduction

This Code of Corporate Governance (“the Code”) outlines the Council’s systems, processes and standards of behaviour that deliver good governance, detailing the elements and mechanisms that ensure and demonstrates the Council’s commitment to the principles of good governance.

Good governance enables the Council to deliver its outcomes whilst always acting in the public interest.

The Code forms part of the Council’s Governance Framework and, in conjunction with other things such as the Annual Governance Statement and Constitutional Review, provides a cycle of continuous improvement of governance.

This Code sets out for Oxford City Council:

1. Its Corporate Governance Principles
2. How the Council’s Governance Framework meets the Principles
3. How the Council ensures review and maintenance of the Code of Corporate Governance.

The Code does not assess the Council’s performance against this Framework, which is undertaken as part of the preparation of the Council’s Annual Governance Statement.

Corporate Governance Principles

Good Corporate Governance is about the Council ensuring it is doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner.

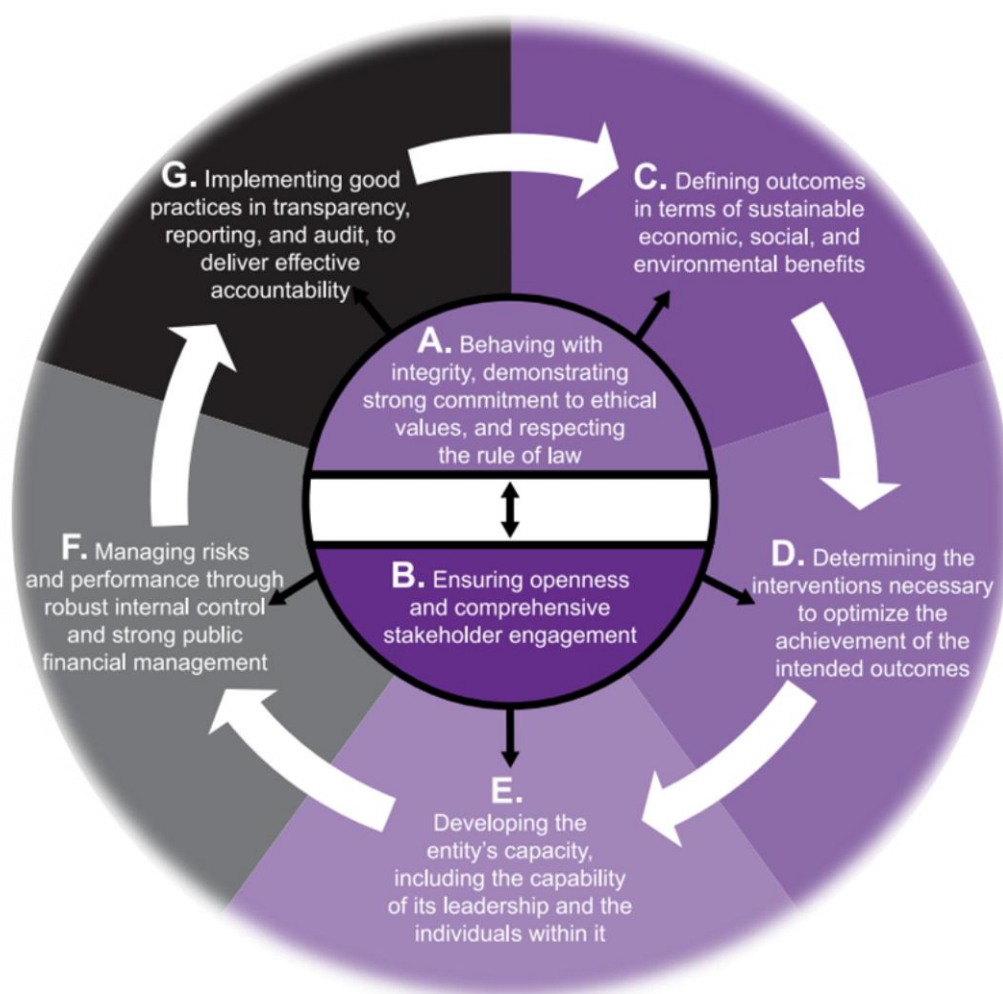
As has been seen in many examples of intervention across the sector, poor governance in a council is likely to have a detrimental impact on the Council’s ability to deliver best value in carrying out its functions.

To that end good governance is vital in contributing to effective:

- leadership and management;
- performance and risk management;
- stewardship of public money; and
- public engagement and outcomes for our citizens and service users.

The “Delivering Good Governance Local Government Framework” produced by CIPFA in conjunction with SOLACE (the CIPFA Framework) establishes seven principles of good governance. Through the adoption of this Code the Council is setting out its commitment to upholding these principles of good governance.

The CIPFA Framework establishes the following 7 principles:



How the Council ensures it meets the Corporate Governance Principles

The Council has established the key documents and bodies set out in Appendix 1 to this Code, each of which is integral to the delivery of good governance throughout the Council and its decision making.

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

Behaving with integrity

- Our Constitution: Clearly setting out the roles and responsibilities of members and key officers individually and collectively whilst defining the organisation's approach this is the key document for the Council when looking to what it can do and how. Officers and members are guided by the Constitution and put its rules in to practice in decision making.

- The Monitoring Officer is responsible for promoting and developing high standards of conduct Council wide.
- Key policies including the Whistleblowing Policy, Codes of Conduct, Anti-Bribery Policy (see Appendix 1) all ensure clear and transparent processes and decision making where concerns are raised or issues arise in terms of conduct of officers and members and set expectations as to behaviour, along with the process for upholding those expectations.
- Members are required to register interests and gifts/ hospitality: the register of members' interests and the details of gifts/ hospitality are published on the Council's website and members are required to declare any relevant interests at formal meetings. Officers are required to submit declarations of interests and a register is published on the council's website on a quarterly basis of gifts and hospitality offered to officers.
- The Council has a zero tolerance policy towards bribery, fraud and corruption as reflected in its policies and procedures.
- The Member Development Programme includes training for Members on their roles and responsibilities in relation to integrity and conduct.

Demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values

- Oxford City Council has adopted and embedded in all its relevant policies the Seven Principles of Public Life (the Nolan Principles) which officers and members are expected to adhere to.
- The Council's Equalities, Inclusion and Diversity Strategy details our commitment to equality and our expectations of all colleagues, members and relevant third parties and sets out the actions the Council will take to tackle and address inequality.

Respecting the rule of law

- The statutory roles of the Head of Paid Services, Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer are clearly defined within the Constitution.
- The Council's Monitoring Officer is responsible for advising on the correctness and propriety of the Council's decisions and provides advice to ensure that council decision-making follows relevant regulations and legal processes.
- The Monitoring Officer as the Council's Data Protection Officer and having responsibility for information governance for the Council ensures that the Council complies with the Data Protection and information access legislation.

- The Committee and Member Services Team ensures that all decisions are taken in accordance with the legislation and constitution, that meetings are lawfully convened and papers available in line with legal requirements.
- The Council's financial rules set out the responsibility and accountability of officers for financial matters. The Section 151 Officer is responsible for ensuring they are followed and implemented.
- The Audit and Governance Committee is responsible for considering the Council's arrangements for financial management and recommending any actions needed accordingly. It receives regular reports from external and internal audit and on risk management arrangements and it approves the Council's Annual Governance Statement which accompanies the annual Statement of Accounts.
- Contract rules reflect the legal position with regards to the letting and tendering of contracts by the Council. This is overseen and monitored by the Section 151 Officer who is responsible for the Procurement Services Team.
- The Section 151 Officer is responsible for ensuring that budget calculations are robust, reserves adequate and in accordance with CIPFA guidance and is responsible for ensuring that appropriate management accounting systems, functions and controls are in place and kept under regular review.
- Health and Safety is subject to an adopted policy that is reviewed regularly, with a governance process around health and safety that ensures corporate and service level oversight.

B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Openness

- Reports and decisions of the Cabinet, the Council and its committees are published online.
- Call-in is applicable to executive decisions, key decisions taken by officers, ward member spend decisions and decisions of the planning department and Planning Committee are subject to the call-in process by backbench councillors to enable them to raise any concerns they may have.
- Council, Cabinet, SHJVG and Committee meetings are webcast, and an archive of meetings is available online and (for more historical records) at the Town Hall for inspection.

- A Disclosure Log is updated with regularly published information and also any published because of Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations requests.
- A forward plan of decisions for Cabinet, key decisions of officers, decisions to be taken by the Council and the SHJVG is maintained and published at least one month in advance.
- All governance and decision-making arrangements are set out in the Constitution, including terms of reference for decision making committees, which is available online.
- The Statement of Accounts provides the financial backdrop to the past achievements of the Council, future plans and forward strategy. As part of this document, the Council publishes its accounts to communicate the authority's activities, achievements, its financial position and performance.
- The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is refreshed each year as part of budget setting. It sets out the Council's financial objectives, assumptions, and plans over the medium term, including the dividend assumptions of the Council's wholly owned companies.
- An annual report of the Scrutiny Committee is produced each year, which outlines the work of the Committee in the preceding year.
- The Council reviews and reports against its Best Value Performance across various reports throughout each year and not through one all-encompassing review. This includes monthly finance and performance reports to the CMT, quarterly Financial & Performance Monitoring reports to the Cabinet via Overview and Scrutiny, the Council's Business Plan, annual updates on the Council's Corporate Strategy and agreed KPI's, as well as the Annual Statement of Accounts and budget setting process.

Engaging comprehensively with Stakeholders (non-citizens)

The Council is actively involved with a number of strategic partnerships as set out in Appendix 1. as set out in Appendix 1.

The Council recognises that it cannot work in isolation and actively engages through trusted community networks to help with outreach work. The Oxford Community Champions bring together people from diverse communities and backgrounds in the city, working as a collective to build strong local services and community cohesion.

The Council actively engages with anchor organisations, which play a crucial role in co-creating practical and replicable solutions that address the needs of the communities they represent in Oxford communities. For example:

- Asylum Welcome
- Turning Point

- Lived experience Advisory Forum (LEAF)
- Transition Lighthouse
- Refugee Resource
- African Families in the UK (AFiUK)
- Oxford Community Action (OCA).

There are several organisations which are independent of the Council but have an impact on its service areas. Representatives of the Council, usually elected councillors, sit on the various responsible committees and fora. Further detail is provided on the Council's website.

In July 2023, the Council invited a Local Government Association team for its first Corporate Peer Review in eight years. The review assessed the Council, ODSL, and OX Place, providing independent insights on their performance and areas for improvement. In April 2024, a Progress Review updated the LGA Peer Team on advancements made against the Plan and their recommendations.

Engaging comprehensively with Citizens and tenants

- The Council's Citizen and Community Engagement Policy sets out how the Council engages with its citizens and communities in decision making. The policy provides the framework for how the Council engages with its citizens and communities to develop a greater understanding of their needs and facilitate inclusive and meaningful involvement in the decisions that affect them.
- The budget setting proposals are consulted on annually before the budget is set.
- The Council also consults citizens, or subsets of the public, on twenty or so other matters each year. While an online consultation portal forms the main platform for engagement, this is often supplemented by additional feedback gathered from face-to-face, email, and telephone contact.
- The Council invites participation on Talkback panels and by publishing Your Oxford.

Both statutory and non-statutory consultations are undertaken with the public and/or tenants to ensure their participation and involvement in any decision making proposed. This includes strategies such as the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategies, the Anti-social Behaviour Strategy, the Tenancy Strategy and numerous other formal and informal consultations to inform service delivery, development and business plans.

- The Council has a Corporate Complaints Process which is published and reported on annually to demonstrate learnings and improvements made as a result of complaints received and any feedback and recommendations of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. This is aligned with the statutory requirement to comply with the Housing

Ombudsman's Code of Complaint Handling, which also includes an Annual Complaint Performance and Service Improvement Report relating to the service that the Council provides to its tenants as a landlord.

- The Council provides tenant engagement opportunities which currently under review.
- The Council's Oxford Residents' Panel is an online group of approximately 900 residents who have agreed to give their views on a range of topics including current work by the Council, new or existing services, or broader issues that the Council may require feedback on. Panel membership is broadly representative of the Oxford population to ensure the Council hears a diverse range of voices.

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

- The 4 year Council Strategy ("the Strategy") defines the ambitions and outcomes of the Council at a corporate level with associated corporate KPIs which are reported against. It is backed by an annual Business Plan, setting specific delivery objectives for each year of the Strategy period.
- The Council also sets operational KPIs many of which are reported as part of regular performance updates to the Council, the annual Business Plan and the budget process.
- The Council has voluntarily adopted the Socio-Economic Duty (SED) in its policy-making and decision-making processes. The Council's developing and holistic approach aims to address and mitigate inequalities from socio-economic disadvantages, reduce inequality, promote fairness, and enhance inclusive decision-making for Oxford's citizens and communities. This is reflected across the Council's wider strategies, for example the Capital Strategy, where these pillars are considered in the development of a business case.
- The Council has a framework of plans and policies to deliver the Council Strategy and a Medium-Term Financial Strategy that prioritises resources to the delivery of it.
- Service planning is undertaken in conjunction with the Budget setting annually to ensure that there is a reflection. This sets the department objectives.
- Equalities Impact Assessments are made in line with internal requirements, ensuring that the outcomes are reflective of, take account of and are responsive to any impacts upon equalities in achieving the outcomes, ensuring the outcomes of the Equalities, Inclusion and Diversity Strategy.

- The Council has set longer term objectives and defined pathways for its own operations to become Net Zero by 2030 and for the city of Oxford to become Net Zero by 2040.
- For significant decisions, carbon and environmental considerations align with internal requirements, ensuring outcomes reflect and respond to impacts on the Council achieving its Net Zero aspirations.
- Social value:
 - All template Request for Quotation and Invitation to Tender documents ask for a minimum 10% weighting for responses to social value questions.
 - We have “Match my Oxford”, an easy-to-use online social value platform that helps community projects, businesses and suppliers connect and find ways to support each other.
- The Oxford Living Wage (OLW) is an hourly minimum wage designed to provide workers in Oxford with enough earnings to meet the city’s high living costs. The rate is set annually and is 95% of the London Living Wage, as determined by the Living Wage Foundation. This initiative aims to provide liveable earnings, improve worker motivation and retention, and enhance the reputation of employers who adopt it. By offering fair wages, the OLW seeks to address the financial challenges faced by workers, promoting a more equitable and sustainable local economy.
- The Council has adopted the OLW and has pledged to continue to be a Disability Confident employer, to improve the diversity of the workforce through inclusive recruitment practices, to offer work experience for local school and college students who are disadvantaged and to pledge unspent apprenticeship levy to local organisations to grow apprenticeships in Oxford.

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

Determining Interventions

- To underpin the delivery of the Council Strategy, the Council publishes an annual Business Plan that sets out the key transformative priorities and actions the Council will undertake in each year of the Council Strategy.
- In turn the annual Business Plan is complemented by the Council’s annual Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan that will allocate resources against the priorities set.
- Service Plans are developed and owned by each service area following the creation of the Business Plan, drilling into more detail, and embedding the Council’s regular work, which is not captured in the Business Plan.

- The Council maintains a Capital Strategy that sets out the principles the Council will follow in its capital planning including the methodology for inclusion of schemes within the Capital Programme and the arrangements for management of capital schemes.
- All reports brought to the Cabinet, the Council and its committees include consideration of legal and finance comments, and all require legal and finance clearance before publication.
- Clear statements of the roles of the Council, the Cabinet (as a group and individually), their Committees and officers are set out in the Constitution.
- The Council has strong working relationships with Unison and Unite for the purposes of representing the workforce with regular meetings involving Cabinet members and officers.
- The Monitoring Officer and Section 51 Officer (or their representatives) attend corporate boards to advise and ensure process is being followed. Both are consistently consultees in the exercise of any delegation to officers from Cabinet or Council.

Optimising the achievement of the intended outcomes

- Regular reports on performance monitoring are provided to the Corporate Management Team, the Council, the Cabinet and their Committees as appropriate, including Audit and Governance, Scrutiny and Standards Committees (as appropriate). These demonstrate the level to which intended outcomes and targets are being achieved and allow for intervention to address non-performance.
- The Council's risk management processes and procedures are designed to help ensure that risks to delivery of intended outcomes are appropriately mitigated. Risk registers and their updates are centralised in terms of requiring updates and reporting to ensure timely update and review.
- The monitoring of the quality of the Council's governance, risk management and controls is undertaken by the internal auditors and the Audit and Governance Committee. This ensures independent assurance of the risk management framework and associated controls, informed by the reports of our external auditors.
- Key governance boards have been established with defined areas of responsibility to ensure corporate oversight – the Development Board, the Citizen Experience Board and the Communities Board (see Appendix 1). These monitor progress and performance of all relevant projects and initiatives within their scope.

E. Developing the entities capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

Developing the entity's capacity.

- The People Strategy contains the Council's approach to attract, recruit and retain talent, improve diversity and inclusion and develop leaders and managers.
- The Council's talent strategy is designed to meet both short- and long-term resourcing needs by attracting apprentices and graduates at the start of their careers and developing existing staff to build the skills the organisation needs and also provide succession for leadership roles.
- The Council is developing inclusive recruitment practices and providing positive action management development programmes to improve the diversity of the workforce so that it better reflects the communities it serves.
- The Council's Appraisal scheme is used to set stretching objectives for officers that are linked to team, departmental and corporate objectives. The Appraisal process is also used to assess the skills and competencies needed by officers to enable them to fulfil their roles fully.
- It is mandatory for all new starters to complete the Council Induction Module along with a number of other corporate, mandatory training modules such as Health and Safety and Data Protection.

Developing the capability of the Council's leadership and other individuals

- Our Member Development Programme, which is currently being reviewed and redeveloped, includes arrangements for member induction, mandatory training and supports members to take control of their own learning and development.
- Officers can access the on-line learning platform which provides access to e-learning and other development resources.
- Managers and leaders are being supported and developed to effectively manage and motivate performance to achieve the Council's objectives.
- Training budget / apprentice levy. The Council's central training budget and the apprenticeship levy fund is being used to invest in essential skills such as contract management (in line with new procurement regulation), Artificial Intelligence, managing change and transformation and mandatory professional qualifications for key roles. In addition, there is investment in management development, personal safety training and diversity and inclusion training.
- We have several staff networks covering race and ethnicity, disability, women's health, LGBT+ and neurodiversity. Mental health and wellbeing

support is available and is a particular focus for the organisation since hybrid working has been established.

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

Managing Risk

- The Council has an adopted Risk Management Strategy which aims to embed risk management into the culture, ethos, policies and practices of the Council.
- The Council also has an adopted Risk Management Operating Framework which aims to provide a clear and consistent approach to the management of risk across the organisation, between services and between corporate and service levels.
- There is a Risk Management Group which meets around three times a year and covers the Council and its wholly owned companies. The members are there to provide additional Risk Management Support across the organisation.
- The Council maintains both corporate and service level risk registers which are administered by a central team and reviewed monthly by the services and senior officers and updated where needed.
- Corporate risks are owned by Executive Directors and Heads of Service. The Corporate and Service Risk Registers are reported to the Audit and Governance Committee.
- The Corporate Dashboard is prepared each month and monitored by the Corporate Management Team (CMT), it includes emerging and critical issues the CMT needs to be aware of or unblock and highlight risks to the Council and its services areas.
- Corporate Boards are attended by the Head of Finance and the Head of Law and Governance, or their nominees, to provide financial and legal oversight of the matters under consideration and advise on and address any risks or issues in advance of decisions being taken.
- The Council develops plans to prevent, respond to and recover from emergencies identified as the highest risk to the city by the Community Risk Register. The Emergency Planning team is supported by a Service Level Agreement with Oxfordshire County Council's Resilience Team.
- As a Category One responder, the Council is a member of the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum and its Emergency Response Arrangements.

- The Council has an up to date and risk based Audit Plan which takes account of emerging issues and is reactive to them.

Managing Performance

- The Council has a suite of 16 quantifiable corporate key performance indicators (KPIs) as measures around delivery of its Council Strategy 2024-28. In addition to these corporate KPIs, the Council sets operational KPIs some of which are reported as part of regular performance updates to the Council, the annual Business Plan and the budget process. The monthly Corporate Dashboard reports on the performance of all these KPIs.
- Conduct of members is monitored by the Monitoring Officer and the Standards Committee and reported on as required to the Council.
 - The Council's Appraisal scheme is used to set stretching objectives for officers that are linked to team, departmental and corporate objectives and also to monitor performance against the set objectives.
- Contract management - all employees of the Council who have responsibility for the management of a contract are required to undertake the internal Contract Management training course and be able to effectively manage their own contracts in-line with the Constitution and the Public Contract Regulations.
- Clienting of the Council's companies
 - The Council has a Service Level Agreement with ODSL, which it is periodically reviewed. It also has regular client meetings to maintain oversight.
 - The Council is in the process of agreeing a new Collaboration Agreement and Gateway process with Oxford City Housing Limited that will refresh how the company is cliented
 - Regular client meetings take place to manage performance and oversight.
- The Scrutiny Committee has the following roles:
 - Developing and reviewing policy - The Scrutiny Committee can help Council and the Cabinet to develop policy by studying issues in detail;
 - Carry out research and consultation on policy; Consider and introduce schemes to involve the public in developing policy; and Work with national, regional and local organisations to promote the interest of local people.
 - Holding the executive to account The Scrutiny Committee can: Review the performance and decisions of the Cabinet, and council officers (but not decisions on individual planning or licensing applications),
- Finance and Performance Panel

- A cross-party standing panel established by the Scrutiny Committee
 - Reviews and scrutinises all financial matters and budgetary decisions, including annual review of the Council's budget, quarterly monitoring of finance and performance (including performance of the Council's companies), executive decisions made in relation to any companies wholly or partly owned by the Council.
 - The Scope of the Finance and Performance Panel was recently reviewed and included the provision to scrutinise decisions relating to the Council's wholly owned Companies (Oxford City Housing and Oxford Direct Services). Any recommendations from the Panel for part of the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group.
- The Audit and Governance Committee is responsible for:
 - Setting the Council Tax base
 - Reviewing internal control and risk management, particularly: the way the Council identifies and deals with key risks; policies for making sure the Council follows regulatory guidance; the way the Council's strategies, policies, processes and procedures are working in respect of anti-fraud and corruption and money-laundering; the Annual Governance Statement; the statement on internal control to be included in the internal auditor's annual report and all risk and control related disclosure statements before they go to the full Council.
 - Audit and risk; agreeing the internal audit programme; considering the main findings of internal audit investigations and the management's response; ensuring co-ordination between internal and external auditors; and ensuring the Council allocates enough resources to audit and risk and takes audit and risk sufficiently seriously
 - External audit; considering the choice of auditor and the auditor's fees; discussing the terms of reference of audits before they happen; making sure that all external audits and inspections are co-ordinated; and reviewing external audit reports, including value for money reports and annual audit letters, along with the management response.
 - Statement of accounts Considering and approving the annual statement of accounts, focusing on whether the Council's accounting policies and practices are up to date and areas where serious criticisms and important adjustments resulted from the audit.

Strong public financial management

- The Council has a professionally qualified and experienced Section 151 Officer (Chief Finance Officer) who acts in accordance with and upholds the responsibilities and duties set out in the CIPFA's Statement on the Role of the CFO in Local Government.
- Procurement board - Monthly procurement boards have been established as a platform for sharing, learning and collaborating amongst

procurement, commercial and commissioning professionals subject to the Public Procurement Regulations.

- The Scrutiny Committee plays a key role in promoting transparency and accountability in the Council's decision-making by scrutinising policy decisions, service delivery, and financial planning to ensure public resources are used effectively and in line with strategic priorities. It ordinarily establishes a Budget Review Group to examine the Council's budget proposals for the next financial year, which helps ensure good financial governance practices.
- The Committee now has the provision to scrutinise the Council's wholly owned Companies (Oxford City Housing Limited and Oxford Direct Services Limited) as part of its scheduled business. Improved Forward Planning has also been implemented with Key Decisions due to be scrutinised at meetings of Shareholders and Joint Venture Group being added to the Forward Plan in advance of the required 28 days.
- The Finance and Performance Panel focuses specifically on the Council's financial health and performance by conducting detailed reviews of the Council's budget proposals, medium-term financial strategy, and financial performance throughout the year.
- The Financial Rules in the Constitution give a clear transparent framework for managing the Council's financial affairs, along with the Council's Capital Strategy and Investment Strategy.
- The Contract Rules in the Constitution ensure compliance with procurement legislation and also regulate the procurement of under threshold spend.
- The Audit and Governance Committee is responsible for considering the Council's arrangements for financial management and to recommend any actions accordingly. It receives regular reports such as internal audit plans and risk management arrangements and it approves the Council's Statement of Accounts.

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

The Council supports Principle G in the following ways:

Implementing good practice in transparency

- The Council's Constitution publishes how its affairs will be conducted and how residents can get involved. It includes rules on access to information, participating at meetings and petitions, amongst other ways the public can interact with the Council.

- Key public facing procedures and policies are available on the website, including how to raise service complaints and how to make a complaint about a councillor, along with all relevant information.
- The Members' Register of Interests is published on the Council's website, along with any declarations of hospitality or gifts over £50 and any decisions against a member in terms of an allegation of a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct.
- The Council operates a disclosure log on which it published information released via information requests which may be of public interest or be likely to be requested again.
- The Annual Governance Statement provides an annual report on the Council's arrangements for financial and internal control as well as managing risk and identifies areas for improvement and associated actions. This is published on the Council's website.
- The Council publishes all its agenda and minutes online and webcasts most of its meetings where possible.
- The Council publishes all payments over £500 and procurement card transactions monthly, and the remuneration details of the Corporate Management Team and directors in the annual Statement of Accounts and on its website
- The Council publishes a forward plan of decisions to be taken by the Cabinet, the Council, the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group and by officers under specific delegations.
- The Council's Pay Policy and gender pay gap are published on its website.

Implement good practices in reporting

- Regular reporting cycles are in place relating to:
 - the Council's finances
 - complaints to the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, the Annual Governance Statement
 - recommendations of Scrutiny
 - outside Organisations
- Annual reports from the Scrutiny Committee are made updating on its work plan and work undertaken.
- A reporting cycle is in place which ensures that reports are directed to the appropriate bodies through the correct pathways, ensuring sound corporate and political oversight of forthcoming decisions.

Implement good practices in Audit

- Internal Audit plans are produced based on risk assessments of council officers and are considered and approved by the Audit and Governance Committee
- Internal and External Audit Reports and updates are submitted to the Audit and Governance Committee
- Progress on Audit recommendations are reported to the Audit and Governance Committee and officers are held to account accordingly

Appendix 1 – Key Governance documents and bodies

Key Documents	
The Council Strategy	The 2024-2028 Council Strategy was adopted by Full Council in July 2024 and sets out the high level aims and outcomes for the Council to be achieved by the end of the Strategy period. It contains 5 core priorities reflecting the Council’s commitment to a “citizen-first approach”. It is complimented by the annual Business Plans and performance against it is monitored monthly, via Smartsheets, the monthly Corporate Dashboard and reported to the Corporate Management Team.
The Constitution	The Constitution details the Council’s rules of governance, responsibility for functions and decision making. It is reviewed annually with input from senior officers, elected members and the Statutory Officers in full and amended during the year as required either by full Council or the Monitoring Officer where there are delegated powers.
Scheme of Delegations	The Executive Scheme of Delegation has been set out within the Constitution. This explains what is reserved to Cabinet and Cabinet Members. The scheme of delegation from Council is also set out in full
Terms of Reference (decision making bodies)	<p>The terms of reference for decision making bodies of full Council and the Cabinet are set out in the Constitution. These are subject to the annual review of the constitution and are amended as needed for clarity and to reflect changes.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Panel terms of reference are agreed by the Scrutiny Committee as they are established and as required.</p> <p>Terms of reference for officer boards are agreed as the entity is established and shared with the CMT for agreement in advance.</p>
Financial policies Treasury management strategy Medium Term Financial Plan Capital Strategy Corporate Debt Policy Discretionary Relief for Business Rates and Council	<p>The Medium Term Financial Plan, Treasury Management Strategy and Capital Strategy are prepared on an annual basis by the Section 151 Officer and submitted to Council for approval in February of each year.</p> <p>The Corporate Debt policy outlining the Council’s approach to the collection of debt is updated as appropriate supported by discretionary relief policies for business rates and council tax.</p>

<p>tax Council Tax Reduction Scheme</p>	<p>The Council Tax Reduction Scheme is consulted on annually before being submitted for approval by Council.</p> <p>The Financial Inclusion Strategy has been combined with the EDI & Thriving Communities Strategies.</p>
<p>Financial Rules</p>	<p>These will be subject to a full review and refresh in 2024/2025, though they have been reviewed annually. They follow best practice in establishing controls and procedures around all matters financial, including spend, debt write off and movement within the overall budget.</p>
<p>Legal Rules</p>	<p>These establish that the Monitoring Officer can take any legal action necessary to carry out the Council's decisions or protect its interests. They also provide the rules on signing and sealing of documents. These will be reviewed as part of the next constitutional review.</p> <p>There is a need to properly document who can sign an agreement as there are no express rules on this beyond where a seal is applied.</p>
<p>Contract Rules</p>	<p>These are in the process of being reviewed in light of the legislative changes to the procurement regime. They will come forward as part of the full review and refresh of the Constitution in 2024/2025. They set out the basis on which the Council can let contracts to entities. This includes standalone contracts to the Council's companies.</p> <p>Though property transactions and grants are exempted there are no constitutional rules on either and these will be prepared separately and brought into the Constitution in 2024/2025.</p>
<p>Risk Management Strategy</p>	<p>The Risk Management Strategy defines the approach the Council takes towards the management of risk throughout the Council.</p> <p>In light of the development of the Housing Regulator and OFLOG, this will require a review and refresh against the backdrop of both of these regulatory bodies.</p>
<p>Members' Code of Conduct, Member Officer Protocol and other member guidance to promote and support</p>	<p>In May 2022 the six Oxfordshire authorities adopted a new joint Code of Conduct for Members ("the Code") based on the LGA Model Code. A review of the procedure will be undertaken to streamline the</p>

<p>ethical behaviour and proper standards of conduct by members</p>	<p>process to enable complaints to be disposed of sooner where it is considered there is no basis for a complaint under the Code. The Code is supplemented by other policies and protocols in the Constitution which are also covered in members' training. Training is an annual requirement.</p>
<p>Roles of the Statutory Officers</p>	<p>The Statutory Officers (or their appointed deputy) attend key meetings of the Council to advise and support the meetings. This includes meetings of the Council, Cabinet and the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group. In addition, the Statutory Officers will attend other meetings relevant to their office, such as the Standards Committee for the Monitoring Officer, Audit and Governance Committee for the Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer and the Appointments Committee for the Head of Paid Service.</p> <p>Whilst the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer do not report directly to the Chief Executive, the three Statutory Officers meet quarterly and ad hoc, as needed with a good working relationship and regular 121s.</p> <p>The Constitution sets out additional roles for the Statutory Officers, such as the Returning Officer, Money Laundering Officer and Data Protection Officer.</p>
<p>Key Corporate Policies & procedures Whistleblowing Money laundering Anti-Bribery, Fraud and Corruption ICT Acceptable User Policy</p>	<p>Training for staff is undertaken in relation to the four policies listed on commencement of employment. The policies are reviewed on an ongoing basis:</p> <p>The Whistleblowing Policy was reviewed in July 2021 and is pending a review in 2024/2025</p> <p>The Money Laundering Policy was adopted in 2019 and is due to be reviewed by Audit and Governance in October 2024</p> <p>The Anti-Bribery, Fraud and Corruption Policy was adopted in June 2023 and will be reviewed in 2026.</p> <p>ICT Security Policy was adopted in June 2023 and will be reviewed in May 2025. A programme of updated training is being rolled out to all staff in 2024/2025</p>

<p>Information Governance policies and procedures Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) / Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) Data Protection</p>	<p>Training is undertaken by all staff on FOIA and Data Protection as part of the induction process. Authorising Officers and those who may seek to conduct investigations using RIPA receive training appropriate to their role.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RIPA policy – adopted July 2023 and for review in July 2026 • FOI Policy has been reviewed and amended in 2024 • Data Protection Policy – adopted in 1 April 2018, for review in September 2024
<p>Employment, Equalities and other policies and procedures which promote and support ethical behaviour and proper standards of conduct by officers</p>	<p>The Employee Code of Conduct sets out expectations for standards of behaviour and includes equality and inclusion, safeguarding, data protection, political neutrality, bribery and corruption and gifts and hospitality. A register of gifts and hospitality is kept and there are processes for capturing the employment of relatives and conflict arising through secondary employment or voluntary positions.</p>
<p>Corporate Complaints Process AND Housing Complaints process</p>	<p>A procedure published which sets out the process and expectations for those members of the public wishing to raise complaints about the Council monitoring, and performance reporting is made to Corporate Management Team annually.</p> <p>Complaints relating to the Council’s function as a landlord are handled in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman’s Code of Complaint Handling, which is a statutory requirement. We also comply with the requirement to publish an Annual Complaint Performance and Service Improvement Report which we send to Cabinet.</p>
<p>People Strategy</p>	<p>The People Strategy 2024 is being finalised. This is a plan that takes into account the current challenges facing the Council, and sets objectives designed to build a high performing organisation that meets the needs of the community it serves.</p> <p>The People Strategy also aims to support the Council’s planned work against its five priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good, affordable homes • Strong, fair economy • Thriving communities • Zero carbon Oxford

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A well-run council <p>Within the People Strategy we recognise the diversity of Oxford City in terms of ethnicity, educational attainment and socio-economic status.</p> <p>The Strategy highlights the Citizen Experience Strategy which was launched in 2023 with the commitment to ‘working with our communities to ensure our citizens are at the heart of service delivery, getting everything they need to enjoy living and working in the City of Oxford’. The Strategy sets out that putting our customers at the heart of everything we do will continue to be a key priority.</p>
<h2>Key Bodies</h2>	
<p>Corporate Management Team</p>	<p>The Corporate Management Team (CMT) is responsible for the corporate oversight and management of the Council and "health" of the organisation. This includes a significant amount of assurance and challenge on governance, finances and processes.</p> <p>The Corporate Management team comprises the Chief Executive, the two Executive Directors, the Monitoring Officer, the s151 officer and the Head of Corporate Strategy.</p> <p>The CMT meets twice each week to consider strategic and corporately important items.</p> <p>Decisions of the CMT relate to matters reserved to the CMT, such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market supplement payments for staff • Reports going onward for political decision making • Reports from the strategic boards of the Council (Change Board and Communities Board). • Monthly updates from each service area via the Corporate Dashboard • Budget monitoring reports • Policy development and updates • Quarterly health and safety updates • Quarterly Workforce (People) updates <p>Meetings are routinely held in person, and on a regular basis there is an extended CMT meeting with</p>

	all Heads of Service in attendance.
Group Leaders Meetings	This is a regular meeting for the engagement with the group leaders of the Council's political groups on decisions prior to them coming forward to Cabinet and/or Council. It has terms of reference and meetings are generally in person. It supports cross party co-operation and collaboration and officer engagement with all political groups on any significant decisions coming forward.
Audit and Governance Committee	The Committee's activities and functions comply with the standards set out in CIPFA's Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities (2018), and its purpose is to provide independent assurance to the Council and those charged with governance on the adequacy of the Council's risk management framework and internal control environment. It is attended by the Section 151 and Monitoring Officers (or their deputies).
Standards Committee	The Standards Committee is properly established and has terms of reference. It is responsible for dealing with breaches of the Councillor Code of Conduct, amendments to the Code of Conduct, dispensations and reports from and advising the Monitoring Officer on training. Member development will be looked at in terms of establishing a programme and a review of the member induction programme and taken to the Committee in 2024 following the local elections and completion of the induction training programme.
Scrutiny Committee	The Scrutiny Committee operates to provide democratic oversight and public assurance that the Council is carrying out its business effectively; and to act as a check and balance function to ensure that decisions are taken in the best interests of the people of Oxford. Scrutiny carries out research, reviews and hears from independent experts, as well as Council

	<p>officers, making recommendations for service improvement where necessary.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Committee adopts a set of operating principles, establishes and appoints standing panels and review groups at the beginning of each municipal year.</p>
<p>A range of Programme Boards</p>	<p>Development Board</p> <p>Oversees the Council’s capital programme. It reviews and recommends new projects and projects moving from feasibility to detailed design and delivery. It also reviews project and programme performance via monthly project highlights reports and the capital programme.</p> <p>Organisational Change Board</p> <p>Oversees the Council’s corporate change programme across ICT & Digital, Finance, People Plan, Customer Experience and PMO, and the ‘Front Door of Change’ ensuring coordination and resourcing of projects. Reports into CMT on a monthly basis.</p> <p>Communities Board</p> <p>Programme manages key initiatives across the Communities Directorate, including housing, HRA, community safety, leisure and community safety. Reports into CMT on a monthly basis.</p>
<p>Shareholder and Joint Venture Group (SHJVG)</p>	<p>A decision-making sub-group of the Cabinet responsible for decision making as the Shareholder of the Council owned companies and JVCs. Terms of reference are established and clear.</p> <p>Scrutiny arrangements have been reviewed to ensure formal scrutiny of the decisions of the SHJVG as it is exercising powers of the executive. Revised arrangements were introduced in 2024 to ensure that decisions are taken in line with legislation in with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Financial and Performance Panel (FPP) now having responsibility for the scrutiny of the shareholder decisions. Meetings for SHJVG will be aligned with the meetings of FPP to allow pre-decision scrutiny. • Provision has been made so that the Company's reports can be scrutinised by the Scrutiny Committee if timescales align with the relevant Shareholder and Joint Venture Group. • Key decisions will now be dealt with in line with

	<p>legislative requirements and the Constitution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-key decisions will now be dealt with in line with the Council’s Constitution. <p>The group has been streamlined in terms of Cabinet membership to ensure that there is the ability for the Cabinet to function without a conflict of interest arising.</p> <p>There will remain a standing invitation for the scrutiny chair to attend the SHJVG which can be revoked as needed.</p>
<p>Internal Audit – an independent and objective function designed to add value to the Council’s operations</p>	<p>The internal audit function of the authority has been externalised, with the tender due for renewal in 2025. The internal audit fulfils the duty of the Section 151 Officer to maintain a continuous internal audit function under the Accounts and Audit Regulations. The internal auditors play a key role in the terms of maintaining internal financial control in the organisation in recommending the annual audit plan, undertaking audits in accordance with the plan and monitoring the implementation of agree audit recommendations as well as providing an audit opinion on the performance of the authority.</p>
<p>External Audit – providing objective and independent assurances through the Annual Audit report. Process and a range of other measures</p>	<p>External auditors give an audit opinion on the Council’s annual statement of accounts and also a VFM opinion on the authority. They are appointed on behalf of the authority by the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA), the Local Government Association owned company, for periods of up to 5 years.</p>
<p>Health and Safety Boards</p>	<p>There are a number of boards which report into the Health and Safety Compliance Board (“HSCB”) which monitors Health and Safety performance and risk registers. It is attended by all members of the CMT, the Head of Business Improvement and the Health and Safety Manager (“the HSCB”). The following report into the HSCB:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Safety Board (including Union Reps,) • Companies Safety Board • Property Compliance and Safety • Public Safety, Emergency Response and Contingency Planning <p>Together the boards have oversight and responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Council’s Health and Safety Policy. This is a new governance</p>

	structure, established and embedded in the Financial Year 2023/24 and continues to develop.
Net Zero Steering Group	A quarterly meeting of senior officers representing key service areas that considers new actions, policy changes or other factors required for the Council to meet its 2030 and 2040 Net Zero targets. The Steering Group also reviews the Council's Net Zero Masterplan – which tracks actions being taken and is reported to the Climate & Environment Scrutiny Panel.
Policy Officers Group	The purpose of the Policy Officer's Group (POG) is to improve the quality and impact of the Council's policies and strategies. It is also a forum to share information about work streams that are cross cutting in nature and have the potential to impact other service areas. The group meets quarterly and is attended by key services areas such as Policy & Partnerships, Business Improvement, Business Intelligence, Finance, Housing, Planning, ODS, Regeneration and Economy and Law & Governance. It may conduct a strategic review of any policy or strategy in the early stages of development or renewal.
Key Partnership arrangements:	<p>The Council is an active member of several key strategic partnerships. Including:</p> <p>The Future Oxford Partnership, whose purpose is to deliver the bold aims of the strategic vision for sustainable development in Oxfordshire, which all six councils have adopted.</p> <p>The Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP), whose role is to champion Oxfordshire's economic potential, acting as a catalyst and convener to drive a dynamic, sustainable and growing economy.</p> <p>The Oxford Strategic Partnership, which the Council developed and facilitates. The Partnership brings together senior representatives from the public, business, community and voluntary sectors. It helps to provide direction for the city's future, respond to local priorities and engage more effectively with local concerns such as Economic Development, Stronger Communities, Zero Carbon Oxford and Safer Communities</p> <p>The District Councils' Network is a cross-party network of 169 district and unitary Councils, providing a single voice for all district services. The Leader of</p>

the Council is Labour Vice Chair on the body of the DCN.

The Council is a member of the Local Government Association (LGA), and actively participate in various LGA initiatives, including the Corporate Peer Challenge, which helps the Council improve its performance and share best practice.

The **Oxford to Cambridge Partnership** is a group of leaders from local government, business boards, the Arc Universities Group and England's Economic Heartland, with government, come together as a pan-regional partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge regions.

The **Fast Growth Cities Group** is a coalition of some of the UK's most dynamic and rapidly expanding cities. This group consists of Cambridge, Milton Keynes, Norwich, Oxford, Peterborough and Swindon. The group was formed to address common challenges and leverage opportunities for economic growth and development.

The **Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Partnership** is a collaborative initiative aimed at achieving net zero carbon emissions in Oxford by 2040, and across the rest of Oxfordshire by 2050. This partnership brings together some of Oxford's largest and most influential organisations including universities, the NHS Trust, the City and County Councils, large businesses, and community organisations. New business and local authority members from Oxfordshire outside of the city are currently being recruited.

The **Oxford Safer Communities Partnership** brings together various statutory authorities and organisations to tackle crime and disorder in Oxford. The groups' purpose is to address local community safety concerns and ensure all partners tackle those crimes that affect Oxford's community.

The **Oxford Inclusive Economy Partnership** is a coalition of over 100 organisations including the Council, employers, businesses, educational institutions, community groups, and local government entities. The group aims to create a more equal and sustainable region, including the city of Oxford, by addressing some of the Oxfordshire's most significant challenges (e.g. Inclusive Employment, Educational Attainment, Social Value and Procurement, Place-

	<p>Based Interventions.</p> <p>The Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing is a partnership initiative designed to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Oxfordshire, including citizens and communities in the city, It brings together local government, including the Council, the NHS, and community representatives, including local GPs, councillors, Healthwatch Oxfordshire, and senior local government officers. The board also oversees several sub-groups, such as the Health Improvement Board and the Childrens’ Trust, which focus on specific areas like public health and children’s services.</p> <p>The Oxford Economic Growth Board is a key forum under the Oxford Strategic Partnership. It focuses on steering Oxford’s economic strategy and fostering collaboration on economic and business issues within the city.</p>
<p>Thriving Communities Strategy</p>	<p>This strategy has been written following our Thriving Communities City Conversation where we heard from hundreds of people. It is all about working together with communities and partners in Oxford to ensure all residents can live their lives to the full.</p> <p>The Thriving Communities Strategy has six key principles, which guide how we will work to achieve its 10 aims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • target our resources where they will have the greatest impact • move towards an enabling approach using our Thriving Communities Principles • embed lessons that we have learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic • adapt and integrate our services so they can react to changing community needs, working more closely with partners and connecting with the integrated care system • ensure that our people (Council employees) have the skills to support communities • foster a sense of belonging • provide many different opportunities to be active • develop a sustainable, inclusive and accessible leisure and community offer • enable a vibrant, innovative and sustainable cultural sector and economy

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use a variety of methods to demonstrate how we improve life chances and strengthen communities
Oxford Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (EDI)	<p>We are committed to building a fairer, greener, city in which everyone can thrive. To support flourishing communities, we are focused on ensuring our services, investments, and policymaking are designed to address Oxford’s social and financial inequalities.</p> <p>Our EDI Strategy builds on the Local Government Association’s priorities for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. These are cross-cutting themes that underpin all our work and our service strategies. We need clear oversight and processes to ensure we remain on track to deliver our commitments in this strategy.</p> <p>The Strategy sets out our commitment, priorities and how we are responding to the current challenged and their impact on EDI.</p>

In addition to the above officers, Heads of Service, Executive Directors and the CMT as a collective also meet informally with members to brief on upcoming decisions or progress with corporate projects.

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