



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.

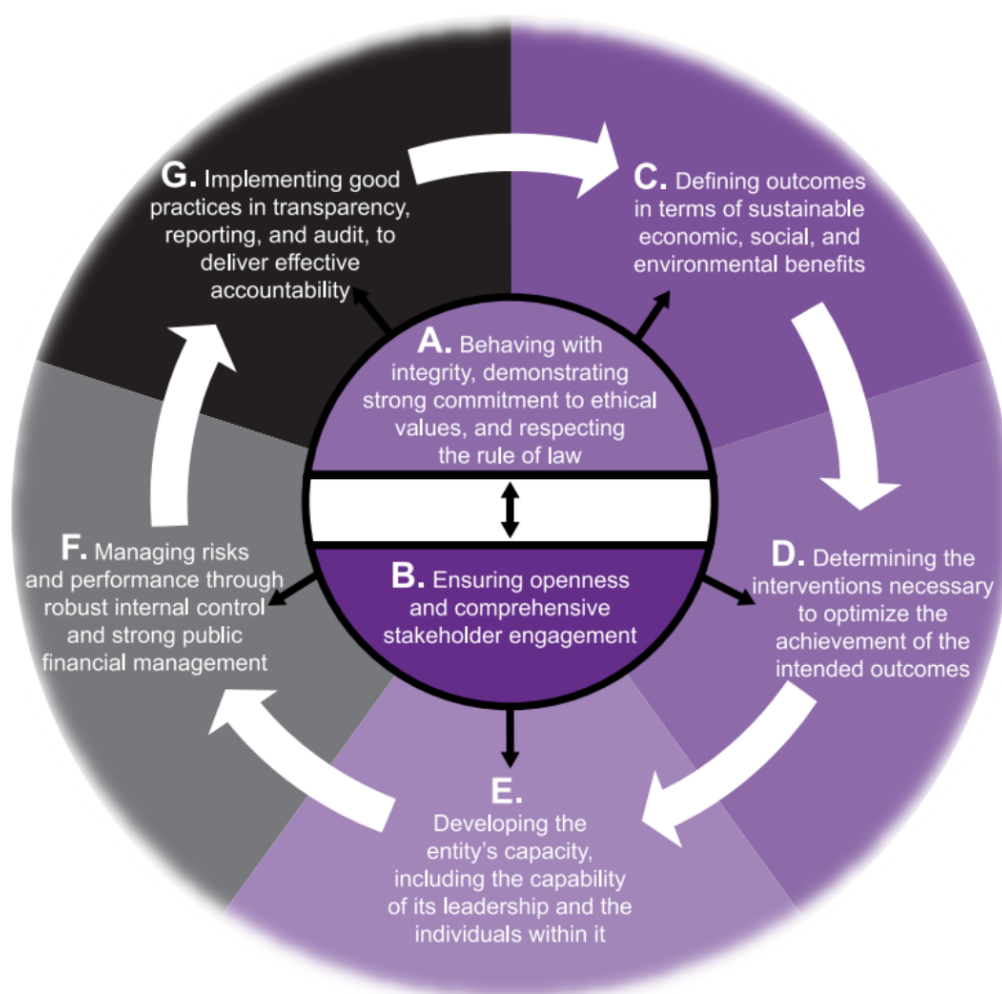
As has been seen in many examples of intervention across the sector, poor governance in a council is likely to have a detrimental impact on the Council’s ability to deliver best value in carrying out its functions.

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	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.
Treasury management strategy	The Corporate Debt policy outlining the Council's approach to the collection of debt is updated as
Medium Term Financial Plan	
Capital Strategy	
Corporate Debt Policy	

Discretionary Relief for Business Rates and Council tax Council Tax Reduction Scheme	<p>appropriate supported by discretionary relief policies for business rates and council tax.</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>
Financial Rules	<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>
Legal Rules	<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>
Contract Rules	<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>
Risk Management Strategy	<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>
Members' Code of Conduct, Member Officer Protocol and other member	<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</p>

guidance to promote and support ethical behaviour and proper standards of conduct by members	the procedure will be undertaken to streamline the 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.
Roles of the Statutory Officers	<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>
Key Corporate Policies & procedures Whistleblowing Money laundering Anti-Bribery, Fraud and Corruption ICT Acceptable User Policy	<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>
Key Bodies	
Corporate Management Team	<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

	Meetings are routinely held in person, and on a regular basis there is an extended CMT meeting with 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,

	<p>reviews and hears from independent experts, as well as Council 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>
A range of Programme Boards	<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>
Shareholder and Joint Venture Group (SHJVG)	<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

	<p>the relevant Shareholder and Joint Venture Group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key decisions will now be dealt with in line with legislative requirements and the Constitution. • 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>
Internal Audit – an independent and objective function designed to add value to the Council's operations	<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>
External Audit – providing objective and independent assurances through the Annual Audit report. Process and a range of other measures	<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>
Health and Safety Boards	<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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 structure, established and embedded in the Financial Year 2023/24 and continues to develop.</p>
Net Zero Steering Group	<p>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.</p>
Policy Officers Group	<p>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.</p>
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,</p>

respond to local priorities and engage more effectively with local concerns such as Economic Development, Stronger Communities, Zero Carbon Oxford and Safer Communities

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 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.

	<p>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 the Oxfordshire's most significant challenges (e.g. Inclusive Employment, Educational Attainment, Social Value and Procurement, Place-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>
Thriving Communities Strategy	<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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • 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.

This page is intentionally left blank