



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT - 2017-18

The Accounting and Audit Regulations 2015 (at section 6.1 a) require a local authority to prepare an Annual Governance Statement.

At Wokingham Borough Council, good governance is everyone's responsibility. However, the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive acknowledge their leadership role in relation to good governance.

The Council has defined its governance arrangements in its *Local Code of Governance: Delivering Good Governance in Wokingham Borough Council*. This details how the council has operated its governance arrangements in the past year. The Council has undertaken a review of its governance arrangements via management assurance statements completed by Directors (including statutory officers), the Council's companies, and Internal Audit.

This process has identified the following improvements:

Environment Directorate

- a. Highways Alliance Governance arrangements have been strengthened particularly with the Council's partner Balfour Beatty and improving governance further in highways;
- b. A lead officer has been appointed to prioritise the delivery of the Building Control Improvement Plan;
- c. Strategic Development Location (SDL) governance arrangements have been operating well and are being maintained;
- d. The work of the Capital Prioritisation Group has been strengthened and is ongoing;
- e. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and S106 expenditure delegated powers updated;
- f. Procedures for external in year bidding for WBC capital agreed at SCWG;
- g. Highway management governance improved and being reviewed (ongoing) particularly in respect of:
 - the SCAPE contract through the Strategic Highways Board and contract governance arrangements
 - Alliance contract renewal through Member working group (in addition to officer Board)
 - Weekly Highways Management Board – officer group

Corporate Services Directorate

- h. Following the audit review of debtors, the service area has put in place processes to firstly analyse the debt into that which is not yet due (eg: sub-30 day aged debt; CIL pre-trigger point), and that which is already under a payment plan. The next stage is to consider which of the remaining aged debt is worth pursuing (cost of recovery vs likelihood of recovery) and propose a scheme of write-off on this debt. That is worth pursuing will be subject to enhanced recovery processes (eg: direct contact with the individuals; consideration of legal enforcement action). Further project work is commencing with legal, and RBWM around the ASC debt to review the processes and engage with legal where it is necessary to secure the debt. All Resource is in place to deliver the actions in the rent improvement plan. Many of the actions have now been completed such as quarterly statements of account, these actions have help stabilise arrears which have remained static from January to March 2018, with April 2018 seeing the total rent arrears amount reduce that is a trend we are confident will continue.
- i. The formation of Strategy and Commissioning has enabled the development of an increasingly integrated approach to policy, strategy and commissioning across people and place services, and further embed the principles of an integrated approach and improved outcomes.
- j. The joint Strategic Needs Assessment process is enabling the Council to increase its outcomes for residents.
- k. Continual updating of all policies including, Anti-fraud and Corruption Polices, Whistle Blowing and the Member Code of Conduct and associated processes.
- l. Enhanced processes have been put in place regarding Executive delegated decisions.

People Services Directorate

The formulation of the People Services Directorate has enabled the development of an integrated systems approach to meeting the needs of local children, young people, families and adults requiring access to universal, targeted and specialist services.

The Integrated People Services Directorate delivery model allows for improved joined – up casework for service users when transitioning between the work of children’s and adult services.

Appointment of a Principal Social worker to provide greater capacity in the work of the Council’s Adult Safeguarding systems and processes.

Strengthened organisational performance governance, oversight and accountability methodology by developing directorate, service and operational team improvement plans along with setting up of children’s service and adult service improvement boards, with external scrutiny.

Development of business continuity plans written for services that previously deployed a separate myriad of documents approach.

All carers being contacted by phone to gain feedback on services to improve carer support, calls logged and themes recorded to inform staff mandatory training on carers support April 2018.

21st Century Council Programme

- m. Member Steering and IT Reference Groups have been merged to provide improved co-ordinated oversight and cross party representation
- n. Dedicated programme board for Customer and Localities in place
- o. Increased training for 4th tier managers prior to involvement in HR consultation processes

Commercial Property

- p. The combining of Strategic Assets with Regeneration will lead to a more efficient process of managing assets and maximising their value.

General

- q. Commencing reviews of our internal governance processes and management of risk including effective processes for continually benchmarking and reviewing value for money.

This process has also identified the following exceptions:

- a. Managing a safe transition from the current Highways Alliance contract to a new contract commencing in 2019 whilst maintaining effective working relationships;
- b. There have been several data breaches from housing services; these have been reported in line with the Council's policy and procedure;
- c. Lack of leadership capacity at Customer and Localities Assistant Director level due to acting up and interim arrangements to cover the Director role have become more pressing as we move through service redesign, staff selection and recruitment and preparation for June 2018 "go-live;"
- d. Within People Services, there were gaps at management levels including a number of temporary appointments that impacted on service continuity;
- e. The key risk for the new Commercial Property team currently is that of resource. The re-structure has enabled an additional two members of staff to come into the team together with a rationalisation of salaries which will lead to rapid recruitment of two long outstanding vacant posts. Through this transition period there is a concern about lack of resource which leads to a risk to process and control. Even when all of these

are recruited to, management of expectations will be necessary to ensure safe delivery and efficient operation

- f. Within the Commercial Property team, there has been an exception around the process for collecting and managing rental income which will be partially resolved when Technology Forge module becomes live. However, there is a limited process for understanding the detail of rental payments which is impacting upon our ability to properly manage the property portfolio. The issue is live with work being done to understand and resolve.

The Chief Executive has identified the actions required to strengthen these areas of governance and will monitor their implementation.

The Council therefore concludes that its governance arrangements are fit for purpose.

Signed:

Leader of the Council:

Date:

Chief Executive:

Date: