

Wokingham Borough Council

Annual Governance Statement 2021-22

Version 5, 15 July 2022

Executive Summary

Wokingham Borough Council is committed to playing its role in making Wokingham borough a great place to live, learn, work, and grow, and a great place to do business. This commitment is set out in the Council Plan and describes how the Council will meet the challenges ahead and achieve its priorities.

To be successful, the Council must have a solid foundation of good governance and sound financial management. The Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance ensures that we are doing the right things, in the right way, in line with our values. The Local Code includes the assurance framework that sets out how and what the Council will seek to obtain assurance on.

A copy of the Council's Local Code and Assurance Framework is available on our website at www.wokingham.gov.uk/governance.

Each year, the Council is required to produce an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) which describes how its corporate governance arrangements set out in the Local Code have been working. This AGS gives assurances on compliance for the year ending 31 March 2022 and up to the date of approval of the Statement of Accounts.

During 2021/22, the Council welcomed a corporate peer challenge undertaken by the Local Government Association. The insights and recommendations arising have been built into the production of this year's AGS.

The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive both recognise the vital importance of having a solid foundation of good governance and sound financial management. They pledge their commitment to address the matters highlighted in this Statement, and to further enhance our governance arrangements to enable delivery of the Council Plan.

The Leader and Chief Executive confirm they have been advised of the implications of the review by Senior Management and are satisfied that the steps outlined in this document will ensure that our governance arrangements remain fit for the future.

Signed on behalf of Wokingham Borough Council

Clive Jones

Leader of the Council

Susan Parsonage

Chief Executive

1. Introduction and acknowledgement of responsibility

- 1.1 Wokingham Borough Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards. It needs to ensure that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Accounts and Audit Regulations (2015), as amended by the Accounts and Audit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020, require the council to conduct a review, at least once a year, on the effectiveness of its system of internal control and include an Annual Governance Statement reporting on the review with the Statement of Accounts.
- 1.2 The principles of good governance The CIPFA/SOLACE Delivering Good Governance in Local Government publication (2016) defines the various principles of good governance in the public sector. The document sets out seven core principles that underpin the governance framework and these are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Core principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE framework.



2. Key elements of the Council's governance arrangements

- 2.1 The governance framework at Wokingham Borough Council comprises the systems and processes, culture, and values which the Council has adopted in order to deliver on the above principles. The Council has a local code of corporate governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE framework (2016). This is regularly reviewed and assessed for compliance. The CIPFA Financial Management Code 2019 (FM Code) was introduced during 2020-21, to improve the financial resilience of organisations by embedding enhanced standards of financial management. The implementation of the FM Code is mandatory from 2021-22, and the Council is assessing compliance with the Code to ensure that financial outcomes are sustainable.

Table 2 – Overview of the council’s governance framework

<p style="text-align: center;">Council, Executive & Leader</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide leadership, approve the budget, develop and set policy • Approve the constitution which sets out how the council operates • Agree Council priorities, developed in consultation with residents and stakeholders 	<p style="text-align: center;">Scrutiny and review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny commissions reviews of Council policy and services and can challenge decisions • Audit Committee and Standards Committee reviews governance and promotes and maintains high standards of conduct by councillors
<p style="text-align: center;">Decision making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All decisions made in compliance with law and Council constitution • Meetings have either been held in public or access has been arranged for the public to attend virtual meetings • Decisions are recorded on the council website 	<p style="text-align: center;">Risk Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk management strategy ensures proper management of risks • Risk registers identify both strategic and operational risks
<p style="text-align: center;">Corporate Leadership Team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of Paid Service is the Chief Executive and is responsible for all council staff and leading an effective corporate leadership team (CLT) • The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources & Assets is the Council’s Section 151 officer and is responsible for safeguarding the council’s financial position and ensuring value for money • The Assistant Director Governance is the Council’s monitoring officer who, with Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources & Assets, is responsible for ensuring legality and promoting high standards of conduct in public life. 	

2.2 Full Council is responsible for approving the budget, developing policies, making constitutional decisions, and deciding local legislation. Council elects the Leader for a term of four years, and the Leader appoints an Executive of up to ten councillors (including him/herself), each holding a special portfolio of responsibility. The Council’s constitution is updated throughout the year and sets out how the Council operates. It states what matters are reserved for decision by full Council, the responsibilities of the Executive, and the matters reserved for collective and individual decision, and the powers delegated to Committees.

2.3 Decision-making powers not reserved for councillors are delegated to the Chief Executive, Directors, and Assistant Directors. The Monitoring Officer ensures that all decisions made are legal and supports the Audit Committee and Standards Committee in promoting high standards of conduct amongst members.

- 2.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its scrutiny sub-Committees scrutinise decisions made by the Executive, and those delegated to officers, and review services provided by the Council and its partners. The scrutiny officer promotes and supports the Council's scrutiny functions.
- 2.5 The Executive has developed a Community Vision (2020-2024) for Wokingham borough, and a Council Plan (2020-2024) which is published on the Council's website. It is reviewed and updated according to changing statutory requirements, the evolving social and economic situation, analyses of needs and the performance of the Council against its priorities. The Council Plan was reviewed and refreshed by the Executive in March 2022. The Council welcomes views from the public and community as part of the constitutional process. These views are considered through formal and informal consultation processes, attendance at meetings of the Council and its Committees, or contact with a local ward councillor. Trades unions are consulted on issues that affect Council staff.
- 2.6 The overall budget and policy framework of the Council is set by full Council and all decisions are made within this framework. The Council's overall policy is represented through the Council Plan which is developed alongside the budget through consultation with residents and other stakeholders in the borough, and which sets out how the Council's priorities will be delivered. Performance against the Council Plan is monitored throughout the year. Progress is reviewed quarterly by the Leader and respective Executive members and is reported through an annual performance report at the end of each financial year. The Council also monitors its performance through feedback from its residents and service users.
- 2.7 The performance management process helps to identify learning and development needs, which are translated into personal development plans for staff. Members are also offered development and training opportunities. The Council provides a programme of learning and development to officers and members.
- 2.8 The Council also has a whistleblowing policy, which encourages staff and other concerned parties to report any instances of suspected unlawful conduct, financial malpractice, or actions that are dangerous to the public or environment. The Council has appropriate arrangements in place to deal with fraud and corruption risks and is committed to maintaining its vigilance to tackle fraud.
- 2.9 The Council expects the highest standards of conduct and personal behaviour from members and staff; and promotes and maintains high standards of conduct by both elected and co-opted members of the authority. These standards are defined and communicated through codes of conduct, protocols and other documents.
- 2.10 The Council's financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA "Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government" (2016). The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) is the Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Resources and Assets, who has statutory responsibility for the proper management of the Council's finances and is a key member of the Corporate Leadership Team. He formally devolves the management of the Council's finances within directorates to directors through Financial Regulations (section 12 of Constitution). The Local Government Act 2003 requires the CFO to report to Members, when setting the level of Council Tax, on the robustness of the budget

presented and adequacy of reserves. The CFO report highlights the strong financial management of the Council. It also outlines the major financial issues facing the Council in the medium-term period.

- 2.11 The Council's assurance arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA "Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Public Service Organisations" (2019). The Chief Audit Executive (Head of Internal Audit & Investigations) reports functionally to the Audit Committee, which approves the audit plan and strategy and receives reports throughout the year on audit and anti-fraud activity, as well as the annual report and opinion on the internal control framework. The internal audit service complies with the Public Sector Internal Auditing Standards (PSIAS) which promote professionalism, quality, consistency and effectiveness of internal audit across the public sector.
- 2.12 The Council's risk management strategy ensures proper management of the risks to the achievement of the council's priorities and helps decision making. In the Council's day-to-day operations, a framework of internal controls (e.g. authorisation, reconciliations, separation of duties, etc.) manages the risks of fraud or error, and this framework is reviewed by internal audit.
- 2.13 Partnership working is governed by agreements, protocols or memoranda of understanding relevant to the type of work or relationship involved. The Council's legal services and procurement teams ensure that all are fit for purpose and the Council's interests are protected.
- 2.14 The Audit Committee is responsible for monitoring the effective development and operation of corporate governance in the council. It provides independent assurance of the adequacy of the Council's governance arrangements, including the risk management framework and the associated control environment, the authority's financial and non-financial performance to the extent that it affects the authority's exposure to risk and weakens the control environment, oversight of the financial reporting process and scrutiny of the treasury management strategy and policies.

3. Review of effectiveness

- 3.1 Wokingham Borough Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control.
- 3.2 The system of internal control is a significant part of the framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.
- 3.3 The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the senior managers within the council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the chief audit executive's annual report, and by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates. The key elements of the review of effectiveness are:-

- the Council's internal management processes, such as performance monitoring and reporting; the staff performance review framework; internal staff surveys of awareness of and views on corporate policies; monitoring of policies, such as the corporate complaints and health and safety policies; and the corporate budget setting process.
- an annual self-assessment and management assurance statement signed by Directors and Assistant Directors, confirming adherence to the seven principles of the local Code of Corporate Governance and other corporate governance processes have operated as intended within their directorates throughout the year.
- the assessment of compliance against the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance (see appendix 1).
- the annual report of the Chief Audit Executive (Head of Internal Audit & Investigations) which provides an opinion to members on the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control system, the council's risk management and governance process. The overall assurance was, "substantially complete and generally effective but with some improvements required," which denotes that the overall audit work conducted significantly meets expectations and provides assurance that the arrangements should deliver the objectives and risk management aims of the organisation in the areas under review.
- the work of the Audit Committee and Standards Committee which includes responsibility for monitoring the development and operation of corporate governance in the Council.
- the Council reviewed sustainability against the CIPFA financial resilience index over 2 years scoring as 'low risk' on the reserve sustainability measure and 'extremely low risk' regarding the change in reserves year on year.
- The Council welcomed a Corporate Peer Challenge in November 2021 undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA). The review highlighted areas of good practice as well as identifying recommendations for further consideration which have been considered as part of the AGS effectiveness review.

4. Assurance statement

The review, as detailed above, provides good overall assurance of the Council's system of internal control and that the arrangements are fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework. Issues of assurance are raised in the "Governance issues" section and have been highlighted in the "Areas of Significant Change."

5. Governance issues and improvements

Specific opportunities for improvement in governance and internal controls identified as part of the assurance processes have been addressed, or are included, in action plans for the relevant managers as well as the Council's response to the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge. There was a continued focus on the following governance issues last year:

- **Covid-19 Response and Recovery** – during 2021/22, significant capacity continued to be allocated to responding to the Covid-19 emergency. During the year, the gold level strategic group (CLT) and/or the tactical silver level group led decisions on the organisational response based on national guidance and local circumstances. The Coronavirus Act (2020) allowed authorities to conduct virtual decision-making meetings in 2020/21. Despite councils wishing to continue these in 2021-22, emergency legislation was not extended beyond 7 May 2021. As a result the Council held meetings in person albeit with careful management given the health restrictions in place at different times through the year. Additional demands were made on IT systems and staff with most office based staff continuing to work remotely throughout 2021-22. Changes to ways of working are being carefully managed as restrictions have been largely removed.
- **Financial capacity and capability** – the finance team has been strengthened with additional capacity and a new operating model with clear roles and responsibilities and a renewed focus on budget management, benefits realisation and finance training.
- **Risk management** - a cross-council risk management group was formed to regularly review directorate and corporate risks leading to a revised corporate risk register template that improves visibility of accountability for mitigating actions.
- **Member Code of Conduct** – Council agreed in July 2021 to adopt a revised Code based on the LGA model code of practice. Processes for dealing with complaints were reviewed by an independent expert against best practice and changes agreed by Council in February 2022.
- **Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion** – following the Executive's agreement of the Equality Strategy in March 2021, the past year has focused on implementation of the year 1 foundation actions. In addition, the Council's approach to Tackling Poverty was developed to provide focus in addressing the cost of living crisis and rising inflation and this continues into 2022/23 and beyond.
- **Cyber Security** - Strengthened the Council's cyber security approach in response to heightened risks through further investment and implementation of further controls.
- **Chief Audit Executive (Head of Internal Audit & Investigations)** – reporting lines have been clarified to ensure direct access to the Chief Executive and Chair of Audit Committee. In addition, the internal audit function is implementing a transformation strategy to further enhance the effectiveness of the service.
- **Procurement and contract management** – a new Procurement Strategy based on CIPFA best practice was agreed in July 2021 to strengthen governance in this area including the establishment of a Strategic Procurement Board.

- **Statutory Officers Group** – meetings of this group (Chief Executive, s151 Officer, and Monitoring Officer) were formalised and increased in frequency to add focus and promote governance across the Council.
- **Governance Dashboard** – the internal audit of corporate governance introduced a dashboard approach to evaluating the effectiveness of arrangements using the Local Code of Corporate Governance as its framework. This is reviewed quarterly by the Statutory Officers Group.
- **Customer, Insight, Change** – these important corporate functions were moved during the year to the Chief Executive’s Office.

Despite the challenges and adaptations in 2021-22, the Council has maintained consistent essential services for residents, whilst adapting to provide alternative virtual services wherever possible. The Council’s strong collaborative approach has continued to be effective at achieving a unified response, working with key partners in the NHS, police and voluntary and community sectors. In fact, the response to the crisis has added assurance to the effectiveness of the council’s business continuity plans, communications strategy and governance arrangements. The risks moving forward have been detailed in the Areas of Significant Change.

6. Areas of significant change

The Council also faces a number of areas of significant change that will require consideration and action as appropriate in 2022-23 and the medium-term. Significant issues identified include:

Changes to the political balance of the Council

The Council moved to a position of no overall control following the May 2022 elections. At Annual Council on 19 May 2022, a minority Liberal Democrat administration was agreed. This is the first time in 20 years that the Council has not had a majority administration and, as such, will require careful consideration of the impact on governance arrangements including, for example, updating the Member/Officer Protocol.

Electoral arrangements

Local elections are scheduled for May 2023 (18 seats) following which there will be whole Council elections in May 2024 as a result of the Boundary Commission for England’s Electoral Review.

The Council has recently consulted with residents on whether to change its current electoral arrangements of electing in thirds and held an Extraordinary Council meeting in June 2022 to decide on this question which was highlighted in the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge. Council agreed to maintain the current cycle of electing in thirds.

Overview and Scrutiny

The effectiveness of the scrutiny function was highlighted in the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge as an area for further consideration. The Council partnered with the Centre for

Governance and Scrutiny to provide an independent, objective assessment of its current arrangements and recommend areas for improvement.

Corporate risks

There are a small number of significant high impact risks monitored quarterly by Audit Committee through the corporate risk register process that will require ongoing consideration. These are:-

- *Budget and financial resilience* - the Council faces significant financial pressures as the lowest funded unitary authority in England. Although this is mitigated by its strong reserve position, the Council is developing financial scenario planning to test and flex wide-scale savings plans.
- *Health & Social Care Reform* (including supplier sufficiency and sustainability) – the impact of the Government’s reforms is being evaluated in terms of finance, workforce, the supplier market, and IT systems required.
- *Children’s Services – education*. Demand for school places has increased significantly and is impacting on the capacity of the Council to deliver the outcomes for children and young people.

Workforce

Last year’s AGS identified the requirement to develop and enhance the HR function including HR policies and procedures. A new operating model for HR was developed in 2021/22 and is in the process of being implemented. In recognition of the importance of a robust HR service and an engaged workforce, this is a priority for the year ahead with a dedicated programme sponsored by CLT.

Member Development and Training

The Council is keen to introduce a more strategic approach in this area using the LGA’s Member Development Charter and associated resources.

Risk Management

Building on the improvements already made in this area, further enhancements include embedding the value of good risk management more widely across the organisation through further training etc.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)

The March 2021 Equality Strategy affirmed the Council’s commitment and pledge as a Council to tackle inequality in its workforce and communities. During 2021/22, the year 1 implementation programme has commenced the embedding of EDI good practice to ensure this is treated as a business critical issue. In 2022/23, the year 2 programme will focus on further embedding of the LGA’s Equality Framework for Local Government to meet its EDI objectives and obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

CIPFA Code of Financial Management 2019

During 2022/23, an assurance review will be undertaken to check compliance against the code. Whilst many of the best practice features of the Code are already in place, this review will provide further assurance of the Council financial governance arrangements.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The Council continued to be significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021/22. Governance arrangements have been tested but have found to be robust and resilient in 2021-22, whilst recognising that recovery from the pandemic, the worsening economic situation, and responding to the refugee crisis will continue to bring substantial risks to the council in 2022-23. There will be an ongoing review of the financial impact with a mid-year budget review planned for later in 2022.
- 7.2 The Council is satisfied that appropriate governance arrangements are in place. We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the matters identified above to further enhance our governance arrangements in these challenging times.

Appendix 1 – Review of Compliance against Local Code of Corporate Governance

Key

Criteria	Description
Effective	The Council is meeting the good governance principle in all substantive respects. There may be opportunities to enhance governance in some elements of this principle but they are minor and build on a solid foundation.
Generally Effective	The Council is meeting the good governance principle overall. However, there is an element of this principle that requires management attention. This specific enhancement should be included in the AGS and tracked.
Ineffective	The Council is not meeting the principle. There are significant weaknesses; either across the whole of the principle, or a fundamental element has a weakness that impacts on the overall achievement of the principle. This weakness should be included in the AGS and robustly monitored.

Summary

Good Governance Principle	Assessment
Behaving with integrity, commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law	Generally Effective
Openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement	Effective
Defined outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits	Generally Effective
Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes	Effective
Developing the Council's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it	Generally Effective
Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management	Generally Effective
Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability management	Effective

How the Council meets this principle	Assessment
<p>A. Behaving with integrity, commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law</p>	
<p>Full Council has defined the Council’s values, and these are incorporated in the Community Vision. The Council can do more to ensure its values are fully embedded in the culture of the organisation. Standards Committee has met in accordance with the Constitution. No findings of a breach of the Code of Conduct were made against WBC Members in 2021/22. Members’ declarations of interests and gifts and hospitality are published on the website.</p> <p>New Members received induction which includes the Code of Conduct. There is a corporate induction for new officers and 1-2-1/supervision and an annual performance review process for officers. There is strong awareness of the whistleblowing policy, but it is sometimes used for service complaints. Counter-fraud arrangements are being strengthened.</p> <p>Improvements have been identified for the Council’s scrutiny arrangements and we are working with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to address these. The Council performed a self-assessment against the LGA Equality Framework and concluded that it was ‘developing’ The Council has an Equalities plan and is continuing to deliver improvements in this area including the launch of a Residents Equality Forum. Legal and financial advice is provided on Member decisions. The Council has corporate complaints, compliments and monitoring procedures and has improved customer feedback mechanisms. There have been no Local Government Ombudsman findings against the Council nor Information Governance breaches reported to the Information Commissioners Office.</p> <p>The Council operates companies, and these comply with Companies Act 2006, their Articles of Association, shareholder operating protocols and shareholder agreements. The shareholder agreement with the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead has been revised which better reflects the operation of Optalis but also resolves process and strategic priorities for the jointly owned company. The Optalis group has been streamlined with direct council appointments onto the remaining operating company. The strategic direction and oversight function of Optalis Holdings Limited over the property companies (Wokingham Housing Limited, Berry Brook Homes Limited and Loddon Homes Limited) continues to provide assurance of performance for the Council.</p> <p>The Council has a Data Protection Policy and advice on this is often sought by officers.</p>	<p>Generally Effective</p>
<p>B. Openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement</p>	
<p>The Council has invested in its communication team, and this has delivered improved communications with stakeholders across communication channels. The Council continues to invest in its website.</p>	<p>Effective</p>

The Council has a forward programme of key decisions which is published every month. There were only five urgent decisions were taken that were not on the forward programme. All Committees have published agendas and standard report templates and minutes and are live streamed via YouTube. There were 62 public questions during 2021/22. Decisions are accompanied by Equality Impact Assessments where appropriate. The Council has launched improved consultation software, and this has seen an increase in the number of responses to Council consultations.

The Council proactively publishes data on its activities. The Council processed Freedom of Information Act requests, but our performance has fallen during the pandemic, and we are addressing this.

We are in the process of refreshing our Customer Excellence Strategy. Overview and Scrutiny are heavily involved in the budget setting process. The Council has updated its Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. It is working closely with partners including the Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership, Joint Health and West Board, Community Safety Partnership, Berkshire West Children’s Safeguarding Partnership, Voluntary Community Partnership and Wokingham Education Partnership.

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

The Council has a Community Vision and Corporate Delivery Plan that sets out the Council’s strategic priorities until 2024. This is supported by the Council’s three-year Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy. The Council produces annual financial statements. However, the external audit of the 2020/21 accounts has not been concluded as reported to the Audit Committee.

The Council considers risks in decision making and has a Corporate Risk Register that is regularly reviewed by the Audit Committee.

The Council has key strategies covering Health and Wellbeing, Adult Social Care, Voluntary & Community Sector, Children’s Services, Housing, Climate Emergency and Equalities. The Council has a Local Development Framework and is progressing a new Local Plan.

The Council is well progressed on formulating its Tackling Poverty Strategy in response to the pandemic and cost of living crisis.

Generally Effective

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

The Council has standard templates for Business Cases and Executive papers that contain analysis of options and risks. The Council’s budget is subject to review by Overview and Scrutiny. Customer feedback is utilised in making commissioning decisions and service improvement.

The Council works in partnership where value can be achieved. The Council has key partnerships e.g. Health and Wellbeing, Community Safety and Berkshire West Children’s Safeguarding Partnership. The Council has proactively identified shared

Effective

<p>services that were not delivering for Wokingham and left these. The Council utilises its local authority trading companies to deliver services in adult social care and housing. These companies have discharged their legal reporting duties.</p> <p>The Council has a performance indicator set that is reported quarterly to Overview and Scrutiny.</p> <p>The Council has robust budget management and monitoring.</p>	
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E. Developing the Council’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

<p>The Council has an in-house Change Team that reviews operations to identify opportunities for improvement. The Council has an Asset Management Plan and has assessed the impact of the pandemic on its assets.</p> <p>The Council increases its capacity to deliver for residents through effective engagement with partners. The Council works closely with the Voluntary and Community Sector and Towns and Parish Councils and recognises it can do more in this area. The Council is engaged with regional agenda via both the Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership and collaboration with other Berkshire Councils.</p> <p>Last year’s AGS identified the requirement to develop and enhance the HR function including HR policies and procedures. A new operating model for HR was developed in 2021/22 and is in the process of being implemented. In recognition of the importance of a robust HR service and an engaged workforce, this is a priority for the year ahead with a dedicated programme sponsored by CLT.</p> <p>The recruitment of a permanent Assistant Director of Human Resources is underway.</p> <p>The Council has strengthened the finance team in response to capacity concerns identified by external audit.</p> <p>The Council has a Member / Officer protocol that defines the relationship between elected and appointed leaders but recognises that this is an area to be strengthened.</p> <p>There is Member and Officer induction. Learning and Development of both Members and Officers are areas that are being reviewed and improved.</p> <p>Decisions were taken in accordance with the scheme of delegation. The Council sought feedback on its performance from the LGA Peer review and is tracking the implementation of the action plan. Staff have annual performance reviews.</p>	<p>Generally Effective</p>
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F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

<p>The Council has a Risk Management Policy that defines its approach to risk management and details the roles and responsibilities. The Council has a Corporate</p>	<p>Generally effective.</p>
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Risk Register which is updated at least quarterly and reviewed by Audit Committee. Responsibility for managing individual risks is assigned to Executive and Officer leads.

Performance is monitored via quarterly performance reports presented to Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. The Council published an Annual Report on the delivery of the Corporate Delivery Plan. There is scope to further align performance and risk management with the Council's Corporate Plan. Decisions are made using standard templates that include relevant analysis including equalities, climate emergency impacts, legal and financial input. Overview and Scrutiny is an area for further development.

The Chief Financial Officer's Statutory report sets out the financial position of the Council and identifies the key financial risks the Council faces. The Council has robust internal controls with clear financial procedures and procurement rules and procedures. The Strategic Procurement Board reviews significant procurement activity. The Audit and Investigation annual plan provides assurance on the key risks facing the Council. The Council has an Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy and robust Whistleblowing arrangements. The Council is working to ensure that these are fully embedded, targeting resources to greatest areas of risk and opportunities. There were no instances of Money Laundering detected in the last year.

The Council has an Audit Committee to provide assurance on good governance.

Four out of five actions from the 2020/21 AGS action plan have been implemented. The Council has a MTFP and strong budgetary control and effective reporting arrangements to Executive. The Council operates a strong information governance culture including the bi-annual mandatory e-learning for all staff. There were no incidents reported to the Information Commissioner and no breaches identified of the Caldicott principles.

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

The Council is open about decision making with meetings open to the public, with agenda, papers and minutes being published and meetings are streamed on the web.

The Council produces an Annual Report on the delivery of the Corporate Delivery Plan and a Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement. External Audit produce an Annual Audit Letter and progress has been made in implementing these. The Council has not yet developed an assurance framework to identify and co-ordinate the sources of assurance. Accountability for delivery of corrective action and improvement activity is reported to Audit Committee.

The Council conducted a Self-assessment against Audit Committee Arrangements: Initial Self-Assessment of Good Practice (August 2021) and reported these findings to the Audit Committee.

The Council has strengthened the reporting lines of the Chief Audit Executive to ensure regular access to the Chief Executive and Audit Committee Chair. The Council has formalised the meetings of the Head of Paid Service, Section 151 Officer and

Effective

Monitoring Officer into a Statutory Officers Group that meets at least quarterly to review the Council's governance dashboard.

The Council has published the November 2021 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge report and actions are being monitored by Executive.

Appendix 2 – 2021/22 Action Plan

Area of Focus	Action	Who	Timescale
Constitution – Member/Officer protocol	Review and update protocol supported by training for members and officers.	Assistant Director Governance (Monitoring Officer)	December 2022
Electoral Arrangements	Support the Local Government Boundary Commission for England’s electoral review of Wokingham Borough.	Assistant Director Governance (Monitoring Officer)	March 2023
Overview & Scrutiny function	Implement recommendations of Centre for Governance & Scrutiny’s review of current arrangements.	Assistant Director Governance (Monitoring Officer)	To be confirmed (when report received)
Risk management	Continue to review the identification and mitigation of key corporate risks with Audit Committee oversight and review quarterly.	Assistant Director Governance (Monitoring Officer)	Sept 2022 Nov 2022 Feb 2023
Workforce	Development of key improvement themes linked to an overarching workforce programme.	Assistant Director HR	March 2023
Member Development & training	Introduce new development and training programme based on LGA charter scheme.	Assistant Director Governance (Monitoring Officer)	March 2023
CIPFA Code of Financial Management	Undertake assurance review to confirm compliance.	Assistant Director Finance	March 2023