Local Code of Corporate Governance

2024

Hart

DISTRICT COUNCIL

Introduction
Hart District Council recognises that it is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money entrusted to it is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

Members and Officers are responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of the Council's affairs and the stewardship of the resources at its disposal.

Corporate governance comprises those arrangements put in place by the Council to ensure that in always acting in the public interest, the intended outcomes for service users and stakeholders are defined and achieved. It is about doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, transparent, honest and accountable way.

Corporate Governance Framework
The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and Society of Local Authority Chief Executives published a practice framework "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government" (2016). That framework is used as the basis for the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance. This Code is reviewed annually, approved by the Audit Committee and is a key supporting document for the Council's statutory Annual Governance Statement.

The Code has seven Principles.

Acting in the public interest requires a commitment to and effective arrangements for:

- Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law
- Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.

In addition, achieving good governance also requires effective arrangements for:

- Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits
- Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
- Developing the Council's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
- Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong financial management
- Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit, to deliver effective accountability.

3   Delivering the Framework

The Council recognises that it is important that the framework is applied in such a way that it demonstrates both the spirit and ethos of good governance. This cannot be achieved by the implementation of policies and procedures alone but also requires the culture of the Council and its core values to be reflective of the hallmarks of good governance.

Set out on the following pages are details of the processes and procedures in place to support delivery of each of the seven Principles. They are a combination of both written policies and procedures that contain not only rules and regulations to be followed but also actions to be taken and the standards of behaviour required to be observed. In addition, also listed are a number of activities that underpin the day-to-day management and administration of the Council. Compliance represents good governance practice.

Underpinning each of the Principles in the Council's commitment to equality of opportunity in its approach to policymaking, service delivery and employment.

Principle 1
Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.

What this means: The Council has clear, transparent decision-making processes which align with our ethical values. Decisions that have been made are lawful and Codes of Conduct set out expectations on behaviour and integrity.

- Codes of Conduct for Members' and employees are in place. The Members' code is included in the Constitution. It is consistent with the seven Nolan Principles of selfishness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honestly and leadership
- Register of gifts & hospitality
- Register of interests for both Members and staff.
- Corporate complaints policy refreshed and adopted by Cabinet in September 2024.
- Overview & Scrutiny Committee receive the annual review letter of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
- Standards Committee, promoting high standards of conduct within the Council
- Members declaration of interests at meetings and the recording of same in Committee minutes
- Details of upcoming and past Committee meetings, agendas, reports and minutes are published on the website. Meetings are open to the public for all items apart from those that are exempt from publication
- Financial Regulations and Contract Standing Orders detailing good financial administration and procurement practices
- Codes and Protocols contained in the Constitution – Member Code of Conduct, Members disclosable and non-disclosable interests, codes of good practice for planning and licensing. Member/Officer working, the roles and responsibilities of the Executive Leader of the Council and the Head of Paid Service

- Statutory Officers in post (Executive Director, Monitoring Officer and Responsible Financial Officer)
- Responsible Financial Officer complies with the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer.
- New employee welcome/induction events led by Chief Executive
- Formal staff appraisal system
- Hart values developed by staff to reflect their commitment to work together for both residents and communities
- New Councillor induction event. In respect of Councillors elected at the May 2024 elections, the event was recorded and made available to all new Members to watch at their convenience
- Development opportunities offered to Members
- Members of Licensing Committee and Development Management Committee are required to attend annual training relevant to these roles
- Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy, which details the Council's zero tolerance of fraud, corruption and bribery and its pro-active approve to preventing and detecting fraud
- Whistleblowing policy for the use of both employees and suppliers
- Anti-money Laundering Policy and Procedure
- Annual countering fraud report to Audit Committee
- Corporate Equality Objectives and Policy
- Equality and Diversity information
- ICT Policies including Data Protection.

Principle 2
Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.

What this means: The Council exists to serve its residents and local businesses. We work with a wide variety of stakeholders and work effectively in partnership. Consultation and engagement mechanisms are in place.

- The Council's priority outcomes are contained within the Corporate Plan
- The Annual Governance Statement which details significant governance improvements that are required together with the progress made in delivering improvements from the previous year
- Meetings are open to the public for all items apart from those exempt from publication and are normally livestreamed so all residents can watch from home
- A Forward Plan of key decision is published
- The public can put questions to Members at Council, Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Documents on the website (Council's Scheme for Public Questions and Public Participation at Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee) set out the process to be followed. The public are also allowed to speak at Planning Committee meetings on applications
- Communication and Engagement Strategy
- Consultation webpage on the Council's website that lists current and recently closed consultations
- Published Customer Care Standards and an opportunity via the website for customers to provide feedback on the level of service received

- Corporate complaints policy
- The Council maintains and regularly updates its website
- Publishing information to meet the requirements of the Local Government Transparency Code 2015
- Hart News for residents
- Parish newsletter every fortnight is sent with updates to all Parishes, Hampshire County Councillors, MP's and District Councillors
- The Council maintains a social media presence across Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube
- Monthly Team Brief for staff and fortnightly newsletters are used to inform staff of key events.

Principle 3
Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.

What this means: The Council works with communities to plan outcomes. In setting policies and strategies, the Council takes account of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits.

- Following the successful adoption of the Climate Change Action Plan, the Council declared a climate emergency in April 2021. This commits the Council to putting the reduction of CO_2 in the atmosphere at the front and centre of all policies and formal decision making. To deliver this ambitious target requires ongoing and meaningfully engagement with the local community and partners
- The Corporate and Service Plans provides a clear direction and set of outcomes to be delivered, both in the long and short term
- Medium term financial plan
- Annual revenue and capital budget
- Capital Strategy
- A performance management framework is in place. Monitoring of the budget, service delivery and the achievement of performance targets is regularly undertaken by both Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet
- A risk management policy was adopted in March 2023. Risk registers are maintained at both a Corporate and Service level and reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee twice yearly. They are regularly reviewed and updated
- Social Value benefits are considered when significant contracts are being sought.
- Communications and Engagement Strategy
- The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was reviewed and updated and the Strategy for the period 2022-2027 was adopted in December 2022.
- Treasury Management Strategy
- Monthly Corporate Project Management meetings overseeing progress via our project management structures and protocol.

Principle 4
Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.

What this means: The Council takes decisions on interventions based on its clear vision for services, engaging with communities, stakeholders and the expertise of professional service officers.

- Communication and Engagement Strategy
- Regular Portfolio Holder Meetings with Executive Directors
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive a wide variety of reports to scrutinise and provide comment upon to Cabinet
- Service Panels are in place for all Services. Reports which include agreed performance indicators, are considered in depth by Members and Officers
- Regular financial/budget monitoring and reporting
- Project Management structures and protocol
- Regular review of Corporate and Service risk registers
- Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-2025. Includes an indicative forward forecast for future years and identifies potential growth/savings
- Decision making protocols contained in the Constitution
- Forward plans which list the key-decisions that are planned to be made over the next three months
- Members attend the Five Councils Partnership Corporate Services Joint Committee to discuss the performance of contractors providing a range of services to the Council under the Five Councils umbrella.

Principle 5
Developing the Council's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.

What this means: The Council maintains an effective relationship between the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive. We encourage the development of all employees to ensure they are able to carry out their roles effectively.

- Corporate Equality Policy
- Delivered a range of equality and diversity training and awareness sessions to help mainstream equalities considerations into the council's everyday business
- Human Resources policies, including the recruitment policy
- Job descriptions reflective of the roles undertaken and reviewed prior to posts being advertised
- Member Induction
- Officer induction
- Regular 1:1's between Officers and Managers
- Annual Performance Development Reviews which include training and skills development
- Chief Executive performance reviewed on an annual basis by the Staffing Committee based on the feedback from the Group Leaders. Objectives are set annually by the Staffing Committee
- Mandatory Officer and Member Training
- Continuing Professional Development and learning programmes
- Corporate Peer Challenges

- Health and Wellbeing Support services in place such as the Employee Assistance Programme
- Protocol for Member/Officer relations within the Constitution
- Scheme of Delegation within the Constitution is reviewed annually to ensure it reflects legal and organisational changes
- Monthly meetings with the Political Group Leaders to enable conversations around future initiatives or challenges
- Chief Executive's join periodic Cabinet awayday discussions on the future ambitions of the Administration

Principle 6

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

What this means: The Council maintains an approriate internal control framework, Financial management is robust to enusre council spending is within agreed budgets.

- Risk Management Policy. This was last updated in 2023. Roles and responsibilities are clearly set out
- Risk Registers – risks are allocated to named individuals
- Southern Internal Audit Partnership who undertake their work in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards
- External audit work programme and statutory reporting
- Audit Committee. They have a regular work programme, which includes noting progress made by Managers to address internal control weaknesses.
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Constructive comment is made on reports received and forwarded to Cabinet for consideration
- Annual review of the Local Code of Corporate Governance
- Robust review of the internal control environment ahead of the preparation of an Annual Governance Statement
- Self-assessment undertaken against CIPFA Financial Management Code. Progress on action plan reported to Members
- Treasury Management reports
- Budget Monitoring
- Financial Regulations revised in November 2020. Changes made to language so that they become easily understandable
- Contract Standing Orders. These were updated in 202 to reflect recent changes in the Five Council's partnering arrangements
- Cyber and Fraud Awareness training for officers and members
- GDPR training for officers
- Annual fraud risk assessment undertaken by Audit
- Policies and procedures in place to prevent fraud, including whistleblowing
- Participation in national data matching exercises to identify fraud across boundaries
- IT policies dealing with data security, data sharing, GDPR and record retention

- Safeguarding procedures, ensuing those delivering services on behalf of the Council are adequately trained and the reporting of abuse and exploitation is encouraged, and everyone feels supported to do so.

Principle 7
Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit, to deliver effective accountability.

What this means: The Council has transparent processes in place to ensure our decisions are in the public domain through our website, financial reporting is robust.

- The Council maintains and regularly updates its website. A new website was launched by March 2023
- The Council has a social media presence on Facebook, X, Instagram. LinkedIn and YouTube. Committee meetings are available on YouTube for three months after broadcast
- Annual Governance Statement
- Annual Statement of Accounts and supporting narrative follows best practice
- As required by Statute, the financial accounts are open for public inspection each year within a pre-defined time
- Publishing information to meet the requirements of the Local Government Transparency Code 2015
- Meetings are open to the public for all items apart from those exempt from publication and the Council welcomes members of the public to attend and ask questions. The public can put questions to Members at Council, Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Documents on the website (Council's Scheme for Public Questions and Public Participation at Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee) set out the process to be followed. The public are also allowed to speak at Planning Committee meetings
- Internal Audit and External Audit reports are routinely published with Audit Committee papers
- Compliance with CIPFA codes and practices
- Peer challenges and external reviews
- Performance of the Council is published by the Government, often by function e.g, waste & recycling rates.

4   Monitoring the Framework

The effectiveness of the governance arrangements set out above will be considered during the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement.

The Annual Governance Statement will be reported to and approved by the Audit Committee. It will include a statement as to whether the governance arrangements are adequate and working effectively in practice or identify any significant gaps in the governance arrangements and if so, require an improvement plan to be prepared that details the action to be taken to address any weaknesses.

Once approved, the Annual Governance Statement will be published alongside the Statement of Accounts.

Version control

Date created	March 2017
Review date	Oct 2024
Next review date	Oct 2025
Owner	Executive Director for Corporate Services