Annual Governance Statement

Statement

2023 – 2024

Content

Executive Summary

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

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

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

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

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

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

Susan Brown   *Caroline Green*

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the   Caroline Green, Chief Executive
Council

Review of the Effectiveness of the Council's Governance Framework

1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

2. Governance Framework

The Council's Code of Corporate Governance sets out the principles the Council commits itself to in terms of its corporate governance arrangements and the steps it will take to enact them. They reflect the CIPFA/SoLACE Delivering Good Governance publication (2016) which defined the 7 core principles of good governance in the public sector:
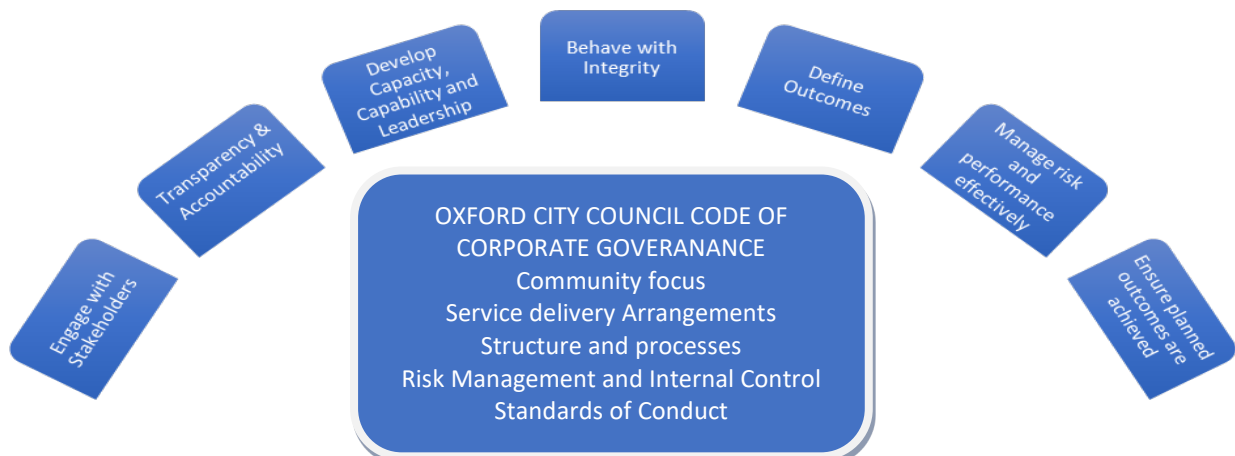
The Council's Code of Corporate Governance is delivered via the Council's governance framework. The governance framework comprises the rules, systems, processes, cultures and values by which the authority is directed and controlled and various routes through which it accounts.

3. LGA Peer Review 2023

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

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

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

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

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

4. Cyber Security

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

councillors. This will continue to be delivered in line with the accepted audit recommendations.

5. Information Governance

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FOIA/EIR

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

Data Protection

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

6. Health and Safety

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. Procurement

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

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

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

The main objectives of the Procurement Board are to:

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

9. Council Owned Companies

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

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

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

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

In light of the Local Partnerships Local Authority Company Review Guidance 2023 a review has commenced and will be developed in conjunction with the new Chair of

ODSL/ODSTL, in relation to the Council and the companies' governance arrangements and documents concerning the operation of the entities. This is ongoing, the first stage concerning Council governance is almost complete.

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

	At present	Improvements planned / in progress 2024/2025
Scrutiny Function	Scrutiny was only operating at the meeting of the Shareholder. There was no space for pre-decision or call-in scrutiny regarding the Council's shareholding and shareholder decision making. There was also no scope for the Shareholder to have discussions without scrutiny in attendance on sensitive matters where there is no decision making. Scrutiny Committee has now agreed that the finance panel will look at forthcoming decisions of the shareholder and call in / scrutinise pre decision as it considers appropriate.	The terms of Reference for the SHJVG will be amended so that: in line with best practice there will be a standing invitation for scrutiny attendance at the meetings; The standing invite can be removed as needed to allow for private discussion; and amendments to internal processes will be made to ensure that decisions heading to SHJVG will be on the forward plan in line with all other executive decisions.
Intelligent Client	The Council has a light touch approach to clienting, which is historic from when the entities were established. This has presented some questions this year in terms of issues that have arisen in the services provided to the Council. This has led to the need for a review. Arrangements have been strengthened this year in relation to works contracts that the Council has with ODSL to ensure robust oversight of the CDM	A clienting review and, in time, review of the contractual arrangements is underway. This will establish a framework for intelligent clienting, specifically, to enable challenge of the entity, holding it to account using performance data to ensure there is clarity about what is being provided for the Council and whether it meets expectations. Reviews of specifications of services will take place to ensure they are up to date and detailed. This will then feed in to

	compliance by the Council and ODSL.	updating agreements between the Council and the companies.
Company Governance Documentation	The Council has in place shareholder agreements with each entity that set out matters reserved to the Council as shareholder, including things such as Non-Executive Director (NED) appointments. The companies have adopted articles which are broadly the same across the entities.	In line with best practice these documents should be reviewed regularly. There has not been a review of either since the establishment of the companies in 2016. There are elements of best practice that are not embedded in the agreement and articles. As part of the company governance review these will be amended, taken through Scrutiny and then a planned regular review will be agreed moving forward.
Statutory Officers	The statutory officers, or their representative, attend the SHJVG. The Monitoring Officer and S151 (or their deputy) advice the SHJVG at the meeting as required. The S151 and Monitoring Officer have pre-publication sight of reports via the Corporate Management Team. The S151 Officer provides commentary to the SHJVG on reports as part of the agenda pack. In line with best practice the Chief Executive meets with the Managing Director (or equivalent) and Chair of the Board of the Companies on a regular basis.	There has been a gap in the commentary of the Monitoring Officer on reports to SHJVG. This will be addressed with the commentary being a joint one of the Monitoring Officer and S151 moving forward.
Business Case	When creating an entity, a business case is produced and presented to the Cabinet. This will include detail on all the implications, responsibilities, risks and benefits of establishing the entity.	Best practice suggests that the business cases of each entity should be reviewed periodically. This has not been undertaken since the entities were established. It is proposed to review the business case for the entities, but this will tie in with other

	No entity will be considered without a business case. Through the business case the Council has a clear understanding of what it wants to achieve by establishing an entity and is able to articulate clearly what success looks like in terms of achieving social outcomes and a return on investment.	connected areas of work, such as the consideration of the structure of the housing group of companies. There will then need to be agreement on a regular basis for reviewing them moving forward.
Conflict Management	The Council ensures that no statutory officers are on the board of any entity. The Council and each entity has a code of conduct and policy on conflicts of interest. The selection of NEDs from officers in the Council will be done regarding their responsibilities in post and the possibility of a conflict arising.	Training should be arranged on a regular basis for all NEDs on directors' duties and conflicts of interest. Guidance should be produced for council officers specifically in relation to interaction with the Council's companies and conflicts of interest. This should be mirrored in the entities.
Board performance	The Council has an updated Job Description for its NEDs as of 2024. This has been used in the latest round of recruitment. It reflects the skills and qualities needed for an effective NED of the Council's companies. There are regular 121's and performance reviews with the Chairs of the relevant Board.	The composition of each Board should be considered in light of the best practice, which recommends a minimum of 50% NEDs (not including the Chair).

10. Statutory Assurances and Controls

Head of Paid Service

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

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

S151 Officer

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

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

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

Monitoring Officer

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

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

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

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

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

Opinion of Internal Audit

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

- *The Council reported the final outturn position a surplus of £3.903 million against the balanced budget agreed in February 2023. This outturn surplus was recommended to be transferred to the risk reserve, as the Council has become aware of substantial risks arising in the course of this financial year, notably from increased temporary accommodation spend.*

- *The Council have not implemented all recommendations due for 2021-22, a total of five medium priority recommendations remain outstanding for the Environment Audit. However, significant progress has been made against each recommendation and we anticipate these to be completed by September 2024. Recommendations raised in 2022-23 have been completed apart from three high recommendations for Income Generation which are due to a new Asset Management system being implemented. The revised due dates for these recommendations have been agreed with management for September 2025.*

- *Our reports this year contained an opinion, including five with moderate assurance over design and effectiveness (Recruitment and Retention, Building Control, Selective Licensing, Data Analytics Planned Maintenance and Refurbishment) and three with a substantial assurance on control design and moderate assurance on control effectiveness (Planning Services, Empty Properties and Dwellings and Accounts Receivable). In comparison to last year there were two reports which contained substantial assurance over design effectiveness (Car Parking and Treasury Management) and two with limited assurance on both design and effectiveness (Income Generation and IT Audit). Overall, there has been a positive change on the control environment where no limited assurance opinions were issued despite the Council continuing to point us to high-risk areas. We are therefore comfortable in providing moderate assurance overall.*

- *The Council needs to achieve substantial assurance on both design and effectiveness on most of their audit reviews in 2024-25 to achieve a substantial opinion overall."*

11. Review of Effectiveness

The Council has a legal responsibility to conduct an annual review of the effectiveness of its governance framework, including the systems of internal control. After conducting this review, the Council has assurance that its governance

arrangements and systems of control are robust and reflect the principles of the Code of Corporate Governance.

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

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

Overall rating*	Strengths	What needs attention
	Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law	
	- Demonstrable consistent implementation and use of the Code of Conduct for members - Code of Conduct training undertaken by all councillors post May elections - Changes made to the scrutiny and recording of key decisions of the Shareholder and Joint Venture group to ensure compliance with the law and constitution around Executive decision making - A refresh of the Contract Rules in anticipation of the legislative change under the Procurement Act 2023 has is progressing. - In 2023/2024 only one Code of Conduct complaint was received against a Councillor, which was not upheld.	- There needs to be guidance and clarity provided within the organisation on who can seal and sign due to some agreements being incorrectly and ineffectively signed. - With the amendment to the Contract Rules there is a need to develop a section specifically outlining property and grants rules and these will be removed from the Contract Rules as it is not the right place for them. - The Governance review of the wholly owned companies will be completed. - The process for officer declaration of gifts, hospitality and conflicts of interests needs to be reviewed in terms of where and how matters are registered by staff - A review of the arrangements for dealing with Standards will be carried out - Recruitment of Independent Persons to be undertaken due to the fact the present ones have reached the end of their term
	Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement	
	Utilisation of the Council's online Residents' Panel - a group of c900 residents providing feedback on various topics, including the Council's current work, services, and broader issues. The independently-managed	Work will be done to build on the Council's approach to involving tenants to ensure full alignment with best practice under the new Social Housing Regulator.

	panel is broadly representative of the population to ensure diverse voices are heard.
	• The Council is involved in a number of active strategic partnerships working together at all levels – from large anchor institutions to small community groups. Including:
	  • Oxford Strategic Partnership
	  • Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership
	  • Future Oxfordshire Partnership
	  • Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing and Health Improvement Boards
	  • Oxfordshire Children's Trust Board
	  • Oxford Youth Partnership Board
	  • Oxfordshire Strategic Schools Partnership
	  • Oxford Localities Forum Meetings
	  • Oxford Community Safety Partnership
	  • Fast Growth Cities Group
	  • Oxford to Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership
	  • Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Partnership
	  • Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership
	  • Oxford Economic Growth Steering Group
	  • University and Innovation Partnerships
	  • Councillor representation on community groups
	  • District Councils Network
	  • Local Government Association
	• The Council invited in a Local Government Association (LGA) team to conduct a Corporate Peer Review (CPC) in July 2023, followed by a progress review in April 2024.	

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

- The Council's Strategy sets out objectives and outcomes and outlines the planned work against five priorities: - Good, affordable homes - Strong, fair economy - Thriving Communities - Zero Carbon Oxford City Council. - Well Run Council - The Council has a suite of 16 quantifiable corporate key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure delivery of the Council Strategy. - In addition to these corporate KPIs, the Council sets c80 operational KPIs that are reviewed regularly by the Corporate Management Team. Many of these tracking operational metrics are reported as part of regular performance updates to Finance & Performance Scrutiny, the annual Business Plan and the budget process. - The Council's People Strategy 2024, currently in development, will reinforce the corporate aims of putting the citizen at the heart of what we do as an entity. - The Council has voluntarily adopted the Socio-Economic Duty to help: - Reduce inequality - Promote fairness - Enhance inclusive decision making	- There will be a review and refinement of the existing policy and strategy development toolkit by April 2025. - The People Strategy 2024 will be finalised and have as one of its objectives a focus on our desire to seek more opportunities to support out local communities and to utilise it to ensure the Council delivers on its social value commitments by looking for new ways for colleagues to support residents of Oxford whether through volunteering, procurement or recruitment.
Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes	
The Council's annual Business Plan sets out publicly its priority work programme activities for the year required to achieve the outcomes set out in the	The Council's senior management structures will be restructured to streamline its leadership team, support greater

	Council Strategy. An annual update report informs of progress that has been made in delivering the Business Plan. • The Council invited in a Local Government Association (LGA) team to conduct a Corporate Peer Review (CPC) in July 2023. In response to the findings, work started early to develop an Action Plan to help the Council keep up with the progress being made. • The Council has a strong policy framework with a robust schedule for developing, monitoring, and reporting policies and strategies to the CMT quarterly. Monthly horizon scanning highlights internal, county, and national policy and strategy developments	collaboration, efficiency and help sharpen focus on its strategic direction. The planned changes will also support greater delegation of operational decision-making at the right level and create opportunities for progression in the organisation.

Developing the entity's capacity including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

	• Clear standards are in place for managers and leaders across the organisation • Management development for 150 managers at all levels has been delivered to build a culture where high performance is both motivated and managed • The annual staff survey measures employee satisfaction with their immediate manager and the leadership of the authority • Opportunities for development through secondment is supported • An aspiring manager programme is designed to develop future leaders and is a positive action initiative to improve the diversity of colleagues in management and leadership roles • The Councillor Induction Programme was updated and expanded to include additional support on key issues affecting the Councillor role, as well as	• The Council's senior management structures will be restructured to streamline its leadership team, support greater collaboration, efficiency and help sharpen focus on its strategic direction. The planned changes will also support greater delegation of operational decision-making at the right level and create opportunities for progression in the organisation. • Work will be undertaken to build capability for adoption of new technology and business transformation to drive efficiency and effectiveness • A review is taking place of councillor development and training both mandatory and non-mandatory. This will focus on

providing clarification on the expected standards of behaviour of councillors. • Our People Strategy is being refreshed for 2024 and takes into account the current challenges facing the Council, and sets objectives designed to build a high performing organisation that meets the needs of the community it serves. The People Strategy also aims to support the Council's planned work against its five priorities.	providing councillors with the training needed to undertake their role and targeted where required particularly in relation to regulatory, corporate, wellbeing and safety priorities.

Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management	
• A balanced medium term financial plan • Regular financial reporting to CMT and Members • Robust financial planning process with significant scrutiny from members • Regular risk monitoring and supported by a Risk Management Group • Oversight of the financial performance of companies • Operational and corporate KPIs dashboard regularly reviewed by CMT • Positive LGA peer review in relation to financial management • Regular review by Audit and Governance Committee of internal audit reports and the implementation of recommendations • Moderate internal audit assurance opinion from internal auditors i.e. no major weaknesses in the internal control systems • Unqualified external audit opinions on annual Statement of Accounts • The Corporate Management team undertook a piece of work to fundamentally review our corporate risk register to ensure it is strategic and cross-cutting.	• There will be continued adherence to policies and procedures in order to ensure good financial management and internal control across the authority. • A review of operational KPIs underway with a view to refresh the reporting process and KPIs across the Council

Implementing good practices in transparency reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability	
- Legislative requirements for meeting papers adhered - Clear policies on access to information for members - FOIA significantly improved with 97% of responses on time - Good practice in publishing officer / delegated decisions – though note improvement proposed. - Disclosure log now in place and updated with FOIA releases - Forward plan now included SHJVG matters - Scrutiny by members to ensure management are held to account to its electorate for the financial stewardship of funds and operation of processes.	- Departmental schemes of delegation need to be in place and published internally for reference - There will be a review of and implementation of guidance on the grounds for papers to be exempting papers from publication to ensure there is a record of why and which exemption is applied - The officer executive decision form needs updating to ensure there is sufficient information within it and increased transparency around the decisions being taken. - A review is required of what officer decisions are published as some operational decisions are currently being published e.g. flag flying.

*

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

Action Plan 24/25

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

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