

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE: ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK
(Report by the acting Head of People, Performance & Partnerships)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Panel on progress made with implementing the Assurance Framework, agreed by the Panel at the March 2008 meeting

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 To ensure that the Council is complying with its Governance arrangements the Assurance Framework includes the following:

- an annual review of governance arrangements;
- preparation of an Annual Governance Statement (AGS);
- implementation of an action plan associated with the AGS;
- a half yearly review of progress against the action plan;
- reference to systems and reporting as necessary to provide assurance and support for good governance and
- the Audit Manager's annual report and comments by the external auditors and other inspections

3. REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE ACTION PLAN

- 3.1 At the September 2008 meeting the Panel considered the Annual Governance Statement which identified issues to be addressed over the next year to help improve further the Councils governance arrangements. Annex A identifies these issues and progress to date. Annex B provides progress to date on the actions identified in the Council improvement plan, reported to Cabinet quarterly.

4. RISK ASSURANCE

- 4.1 A report on progress with developing Risk Management appears separately on the Agenda.
- 4.2 To meet the requirements of the Assurance Framework details of the current internal and external sources of assurance and the assurance level for each risk and risk control are included in Annex C.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 The Panel are recommended to:
- (a) Note progress to date in the achievement of the action plan supporting the Annual Governance Statement.
 - (b) Note the Assurance level of individual risks.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Code of Governance
Annual Governance Statement
Risk register

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Annex A

Issues identified in AGS Sept 2008	Progress to date
Put in place effective arrangements to identify and deal with failure in service delivery (from Direction of Travel assessment 2006/07)	The corporate complaints system has been recast as part of a wider Feedback system, which has been adopted by the Corporate Governance Panel. The changes include the introduction of formal procedures to monitor and analyse feedback and to implement any necessary changes.
Tackle areas of comparative under performance (from Direction of Travel assessment 2006/07)	The draft assessment for 2007/08 confirms overall performance as measured by performance indicators is positive, with 67 per cent of the Council's performance indicators in 2007/08 improving against the national average. This reflects its improvement over the last three years. In 2007/08, 33 per cent of the Council's performance indicators were amongst the best in the country, an improvement on 2006/07.
Maintain the high profile of delivering agreed audit actions on time by effective monitoring, and reviewing achievements when Chief Officer Management Team consider Heads of Service quarterly performance reports	Performance has been steadily improving, and for the 12 month period ending February 2009, 63% of agreed audit actions have been introduced on time against the benchmark of 60%. The overall number, including both actions introduced on time and introduced late for the same period was 83%.
Delivery of the Review of Council structure being led by Cabinet Member	The Member led review of the Council's democratic structure will be submitted to two member seminars in March and considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels, Cabinet, Corporate Governance Panel and Full Council in April 2009. Changes to internal systems & processes will be implemented from the new municipal year. Community engagement proposals are subject to consultation with partners for implementation later in 2009.

Biennial review of the constitution will be undertaken in spring 2009 to address any issues not dealt with in the structural review	The biennial review of the constitution is under way and will be submitted to the Corporate Governance Panel on 25 th March
Delivery of Improvement plan, (external inspection action plans incorporated into Council Improvement plan i.e. Use of Resources, Value for Money, Data Quality etc).	Progress against the Council's improvement plan is set out in Annex B
Undertake Partnership review programme	Partnership review programme is on track. A three year rolling review of strategic partnerships has is due to start following the comprehensive initial review. The Partnership review framework takes account of risk and governance arrangements. In addition the review of democratic structures has highlighted a number of issues concerning partnership arrangements which will be considered in the next municipal year

Improvement Plan

Annex B

(Note: the Council's Improvement Plan is updated and monitored frequently to reflect the development areas adopted through external inspection and compliance with statutory guidance.)

In progress

Completed

Subject	Area of Focus	Reference	Proposed Action	Outcome	Lead Members and Officer	Progress February 2009
Learning & Knowledge	Learning across the Council and making the most of learning opportunities to use research, consultation and knowledge to plan services.	CPA	Adopt systematic approaches to learning and sharing knowledge via the Council's intranet.	Council uses learning and knowledge and research effectively across the organisation to improve the delivery of services and achievement of priorities.	Member: Mike Simpson Officer: Dir Commerce & Technology support Head of IMD	All SharePoint sites have been set-up/migrated to latest version of SharePoint and search facility re-instated. Encouraging the use of WIKIs to aid the sharing of knowledge & experience within teams. A good example is in use at the Call Centre.
Capacity and Resources	Sustainability of spending plans, employee capacity, staff turnover.	CPA	Delivery of People Strategy	The Council has the right number of employees with the right skills to meet its priorities and objectives.	Member: Andrew Hansard Officer: Dir Central Services Support: Head of Personnel	A new People Strategy is being developed. This will go to Employment Panel in Sept 2009 and thereafter an action plan will be implemented to deliver the strategy

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Financial Management - The Council manages performance against budgets	The Council should continue to develop its budget monitoring processes to ensure that it is appropriate for the Council and it meets the requirements of the UoR criteria which include the need to ensure monitoring is informed by a risk assessment.	Use of Resources 2007/08	Significant progress has been made but a formal risk assessment will be carried out to focus further developments. (by 31 March 08)			This action has already been completed, and will be removed from the report.
Internal Control - Risk Management	Risk management training should be delivered to appropriate officers and members prior to 31 March 2008.	Use of Resources 2007/08	All Heads of Service have received training. Further Member training provided in December 2007. Any Members who missed both training sessions will be briefed individually. (by 31 March 08)	Raise awareness of risk and risk management		This action has already been completed and will be removed from the report. JDH 24/02/09
Systems of Internal Control	The Council should develop and implement an assurance framework. Once implemented, processes need to be put in place to ensure that this a fluid living	Use of Resources 2007/08	An assurance framework will be developed and agreed by the Corporate Governance Panel on 26 March 2008. (by 31 March 08)	Agreed systems/process in place to provide assurance that the council undertakes it's functions and responsibilities with		The report to Governance Panel on 25 th March 2009 will address this item. Reports dealing with Risk

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	document that is updated constantly for any changes in objectives, risks and assurances.			integrity, openness and accountability.		Assurance will be sent to the Panel on a six monthly basis
	Internal Audit Managers opinion on the internal control environment.	Governance Assurance framework	Actions identified in the internal audit action plan are implemented as per the agreed audit timetable.	Improve the overall assurance opinion on the system of Internal control.		See above. Also Monitored via Performance Management Framework and reported Quarterly to COMT
Governance	Equalities.	Governance Assurance framework	Implement and monitor Corporate Equality Action Plan.	Facilitate progress in relation to the Local Government Standard for Equalities.		Level 2 of the standard achieved. Progress to level 3 (by 2010) on target. CEP action plan, 7 out of 9 action are on target.
	Consultation.	Governance Assurance framework	Adopt and implement consultation and engagement strategy.	Developing consultation and engagement with local communities.		Strategy adopted in Spring 08 Progress being made to deliver the action plan
	Complaints System.	Governance Assurance framework	Review existing mechanisms for responding to harassment e.g. Open Out, corporate complaints procedure, grievance procedure and	A corporate complaints system that will enable transparent non-discriminatory reporting.		The corporate complaints system has been recast as part of a wider Feedback system, which has been approved by

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			Dignity at Work Policy.			Management Team and endorsed by the Corporate Governance Panel.
	Sustainable Community Strategy.	Governance Assurance framework	Working to develop a Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS).	Delivery of the outcomes identified in the SCS via the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership.		SCS adopted by Council in Sept 08. Work underway to develop and monitor partner actions
Data Quality	Data Quality	Use of Resources/VFM	Action identified in the Data Quality action plan are implemented as per the agreed timetable	To provide reliable, accurate and timely performance information with which to manage services, inform users and account for our performance		Data measure templates, in part updated by services to reflect changes to corporate plan.