

Corporate Governance Improvement Action Plan for 2023-2024

Ref (action)	Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2023-2024	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2023-2024
Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of the law			
1.1.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. All members ensure they attend annual refreshers in respect of the Members Code of Conduct undertaken by the Monitoring Officer; II. All Group Leaders make Standards and Ethics a standing item on their political group meeting agendas; III. All members ensure they are completing their declarations of gifts and hospitality, including where such gifts and hospitality are declined; IV. Group Leaders consider bi-annual meetings with the Monitoring Officer to discuss standards and ethics and how they can work together to promote standards within their political groups; V. Steps be taken to promote the Member Officer Protocol to all 	<p>Head of Legal & Democratic Services</p>	<p>On signing their Declaration of Acceptance of Office, Members are required to give an undertaking to abide by the Members' Code of Conduct. Training was subsequently provided on the Code of Conduct. By the end of June 2022, all 60 elected members had attended and received this training.</p> <p>Refresher training takes place on an annual basis to enhance member's compliance with the Members Code of Conduct and to ensure members are aware of the responsibility to act ethically and with integrity, with advice provided on a variety of matters throughout the year on interests and predetermination matters.</p> <p>The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 provided an additional duty on group leaders to ensure members within their political group also comply with the Members Code of Conduct and ongoing support will be provided on this function via the Standards Committee.</p> <p>The Standards Committee were pleased to note the approach that Group Leaders take in promoting standards and the personal commitment they have to encourage members within their groups to embed ethical processes in their day to day activities. Of interest particularly to the Standards Committee was how Group Leaders deal with</p>

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	<p>elected members and officers of the Council, with training provided as appropriate;</p> <p>VI. A series of guidance documents to be circulated to all members in respect of key conduct matters such as declarations of interest, predetermination, conduct case studies and key information for members.</p>		<p>the “thick skin” ideology that the Public Service Ombudsman and other regulatory bodies adopt and the views that all Group Leaders have that often this is an inappropriate test and it is not something that any elected member should have to have if they face abuse from members of the public, particularly in a social media setting. The Standards Committee are required to conduct an assessment of how political group leaders have complied with their new duty to promote high standards of conduct and the Standards Committee are able to confirm that throughout 2022-2023, Group Leaders have discharged their duty, in the views of the Standards Committee, and that there were no ethical concerns arising. The Standards Committee published their Annual Report in April 2023 for the work of the previous finance year.</p> <p>A detailed member induction programme took place following local government elections in May 2022. This included specified training relating to the member code of conduct, social media issues, gifts and hospitality and officer/member protocols.</p> <p>A protocol is in place as part of the council’s Constitution and Employee Code of Conduct.</p> <p>A review of the protocol was undertaken at the early stages of the member induction programme, as part of the wider review of the council’s Constitution. Copies of which have been distributed to officers.</p>

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			<p>Training has also been provided to officer groups within the council on the nature of the relationship between officers and members and this training will continue in future years. The protocol is monitored by the Standards Committee who considered the protocol and its implementation at a meeting of the Standards Committee recommending a few minor changes for consideration which will now be included within the Constitution going forward and circulated to officers and members.</p> <p>A series of guidance documents have now been produced in respect of member's interests, predisposition and predetermination and work commenced on the development of a guide in respect of social media and the code of conduct which will be considered by the Standards Committee in 2023-2024.</p>
1.3.4	Continue with future training of officer groups in the significance of the member and officer relations protocol.	Head of Legal & Democratic Services	<p>A protocol is in place as part of the council's Constitution and Employee Code of Conduct. A review of the protocol was undertaken at the early stages of the member induction programme, as part of the wider review of the council's Constitution. Copies of which have been distributed to officers.</p> <p>Training has also been provided to officer groups within the council on the nature of the relationship between officers and members and this training will continue in future years. The protocol is monitored by the Standards Committee who considered the protocol and its implementation at a meeting of the Standards Committee recommending a few minor changes for consideration which have now included within</p>

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			the Constitution going forward and circulated to officers and members.
2.1.1	Corporate Procurement to monitor and evaluate compliance looking at what approach sections adopt. Head of Legal & Democratic Services to report annually to the Corporate Governance Group.	Head of Legal & Democratic Services	The Corporate Procurement Team have spent the last year developing toolkits that will enable better reporting of financial spending and to monitor control mechanisms in respect of procurement activities. Work has been ongoing to address to procurement compliance in respect of the use of the council's Select List as well as addressing individual tendering arrangements in service areas. As part of the development of its procurement strategy and ongoing monitoring of council expenditure this work will continue.
Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement			
4.4.3	Review the Citizens' Panel and further develop in line with the action plan in the Public Participation Strategy	Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support	<p>In August, officers met with Opinion Research Services (ORS) to discuss how best to move forward with the Citizens' Panel. ORS have re-opened the recruitment form with an amendment to make it easier to identify the age group of respondents. A recruitment drive was launched in October during Local Democracy Week.</p> <p>In addition an opportunity for respondents to indicate whether they wished to be included in the circulation list when the council recruits for future activities such as focus groups, NPT Citizens' Panel etc. was built into the 'Let's Keep Talking' (LKT) questionnaire. These 'recontacts' from LKT responses will be contacted as part of the current recruitment drive.</p>

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4.6.1	Commence the review of the Partnership Agreement (Compact) between the council and the voluntary sector (to be completed by September 2024)	Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support	Discussion held at Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum – 13 th November 2023 to inform timeline and approach.
4.6.3	Commence the review of the Charter between the council and Town and Community Councils (to be completed by September 2024)	Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support	Discussion scheduled at Town / Community Councils Liaison Forum – 4 th December to set out timeline and approach.
Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits			
5.1.1	Review business planning and performance management arrangements across the council	Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support	Review of the Corporate Performance Management Framework is underway in readiness for implementation from 1 st April 2024.
5.4.1	Ensure all strategic risk are embedded and further refine Directorate (operational) Risk Registers	Chief Finance Officer / Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support	The Strategic Risk Register has been reviewed by Corporate Directors Group and presented to both Cabinet and Governance & Audit Committee. The Directorate Registers are being developed and have been presented to Corporate Directors Group (as set out in the council's Corporate Risk Management Policy).
5.5.1	Revisit the Let's Talk campaign during 2023-2024 to inform priorities for 2024-2025.	Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support	The Let's Keep Talking campaign was launched at the end of June 2023 and ran until 8 th October. The output will help inform the council's updated Corporate Plan for the period 2024-2027.

Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

6.1.1	Further refine the council's annual self-assessment process.	Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support	The self-assessment for 2022-2023 has been undertaken. Further work is required to ensure the self-assessment fits within the Corporate Performance Management Framework to add value and ensure its fit is aligned to Annual Report and Annual Governance Statement.
6.9.1	Further development of a medium term financial strategy.	Chief Finance Officer	Work has progress on development of a MTFP however further work is required to develop proposals to ensure the council has a sustainable financial footing.

Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

8.14.1	A review of Data Processing, Data Protection and Data Sharing work to be undertaken by the Information Governance team.	Chief Digital Officer	<p>An audit of council information is underway to identify information assets, their characteristics, risks and any gaps in required documentation. This process prioritises areas likely to involve higher risk information or processes. As higher risk items are identified, they are addressed with lower risk items added to the Information Governance team's work plan. This will progressively improve the position of the council.</p> <p>It is expected that circa 500 Information Assets will be assessed and mitigated by the close of the Quarter 2 2024-2025. Upon completion of the Information Asset Audit, ongoing review of these information assets and council processing activities will be included in the business as usual activities of the team to provide adequate assurance of compliance in Data Processing, Data Protection and Data Sharing.</p>
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Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability

9.5.1	Work to deliver governance awareness training across the council is ongoing and will continue during 2023-2024 to ensure appropriate training takes place with council officers.	Head of Legal & Democratic Services	Safe and Legal Decision Making Training' is available for relevant officers and is provided on an annual basis by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to council officers. Democratic Services Officers and Legal Services monitor reports to ensure legal compliance.
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