

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Standards Advisory Committee – 7 July 2015

Draft Annual Governance Statement

Report of the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager

(This matter is the responsibility of Councillor Williams – Leader of the Council)

1. Executive Summary

The Council is required to conduct, at least once a year, a review of the effectiveness of its systems of internal control and governance arrangements and to produce an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) on behalf of the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive, providing an assessment of these arrangements.

The review of effectiveness was carried out by the Council's Corporate Governance Officers Group who have concluded the governance arrangements remain adequate and fit for purpose. The review of our governance framework also identified some areas where further improvements could be made and these will receive attention during 2015/16.

This draft AGS has been considered by the Corporate Governance Committee at their meeting of 22nd June 2015, before it is approved by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.

This paper is to allow an opportunity for the Standards Advisory Committee to review and endorse the contents of the draft, with particular reference to those elements relating to the behavioural and code of conduct issues contained within the AGS.

2. Background

- 2.1 Taunton Deane Borough Council has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and the management of risk.
- 2.2 Taunton Deane Borough Council has approved and adopted a Code of Corporate Governance, which is consistent with the principles of the Chartered Institute of Public

Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) Framework “*Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*”.

2.3 The Annual Governance Statement explains how Taunton Deane Borough Council has complied with the code and also meets the requirements of regulation 4(2) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 as amended by the Accounts and Audit (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2011 in relation to the requirement to prepare an annual governance statement which must accompany the Statement of Accounts.

2.4 The Corporate Governance Officers Group has led the 2014/15 review of the governance framework. The group includes the Monitoring Officer (Assistant Chief Executive), the s151 Officer (Director–Operations), the internal Audit Manager, the Assistant Director Corporate Services and the Corporate Strategy & Performance Manager.

3. Annual Governance Statement (AGS)

3.1 The draft Annual Governance Statement is included as Appendix A to this report.

3.2 The conclusions from this review is that overall, the council’s governance framework is reasonable and fit for purpose. This is further endorsed by the Group Auditor’s annual opinion report 2014/15, which offers ‘reasonable assurance’ in respect of the areas reviewed during the year.

3.3 The AGS describes how the Council complies with each of the six core principles of the Code of Corporate Governance, and additionally identifies governance issues identified and the steps to be taken during to address these matters.

4. Finance Comments

4.1 There are no specific finance issues relating to this report.

5. Legal Comments

5.1 There are no specific legal issues relating to this report.

6. Links to Corporate Aims

6.1 The AGS reports on the governance framework which is essential to support the delivery of all Corporate Aims.

7. Environmental Implications

7.1 There are no direct implications in respect of this report.

8. Community Safety Implications

8.1 There are no direct implications in respect of this report.

9. Equalities Impact

9.1 There are no direct implications in respect of this report.

10. Risk Management

10.1 The Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, which includes arrangements for the management of risk. The AGS describes the arrangements that are in place.

10.2 The Council's Corporate Risk Register reflects the significant governance issues identified in the AGS, and the annual audit programme is developed and agreed with full consideration of risk.

11. Partnership Implications

11.1 Key services supporting our arrangements for governance are delivered by our partners – Southwest One and South West Audit Partnership.

12. Recommendations

12.1 Members of the Standards Advisory Committee are requested to review the draft Annual Governance Statement attached to this report and endorse the contents of the draft, with particular reference to those elements relating to the behavioural and code of conduct issues contained within the AGS.

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Draft - Annual Governance Statement

2014/15 v1.1

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Introduction

This document relates to the 2014/15 financial year which started on 1st April 2014 and ended 31st March 2015.

This was a period of significant challenge and change for the Council. Following on from the appointment of a joint Chief Executive and senior management team between Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council, during the latter part of 2013/14, the Councils continued to join together the remainder of their officer structure during 2014/15, resulting in the majority of the joint staffing structure being in place by 1st February 2015.

This change resulted in a number of officers leaving the Council and some others taking on new roles and responsibilities but all staff forming part of 'One Team' of officers to serve two independent Councils and their communities.

This significant structural change was a first for Somerset and one of few similar such arrangements within the West of England and has led to total annual savings of £1.802m being delivered to the Councils and the local taxpayer.

Despite the scale and pace of this change no new corporate risks, associated with this undertaking, have been identified by the Council's auditors (South West Audit Partnership).

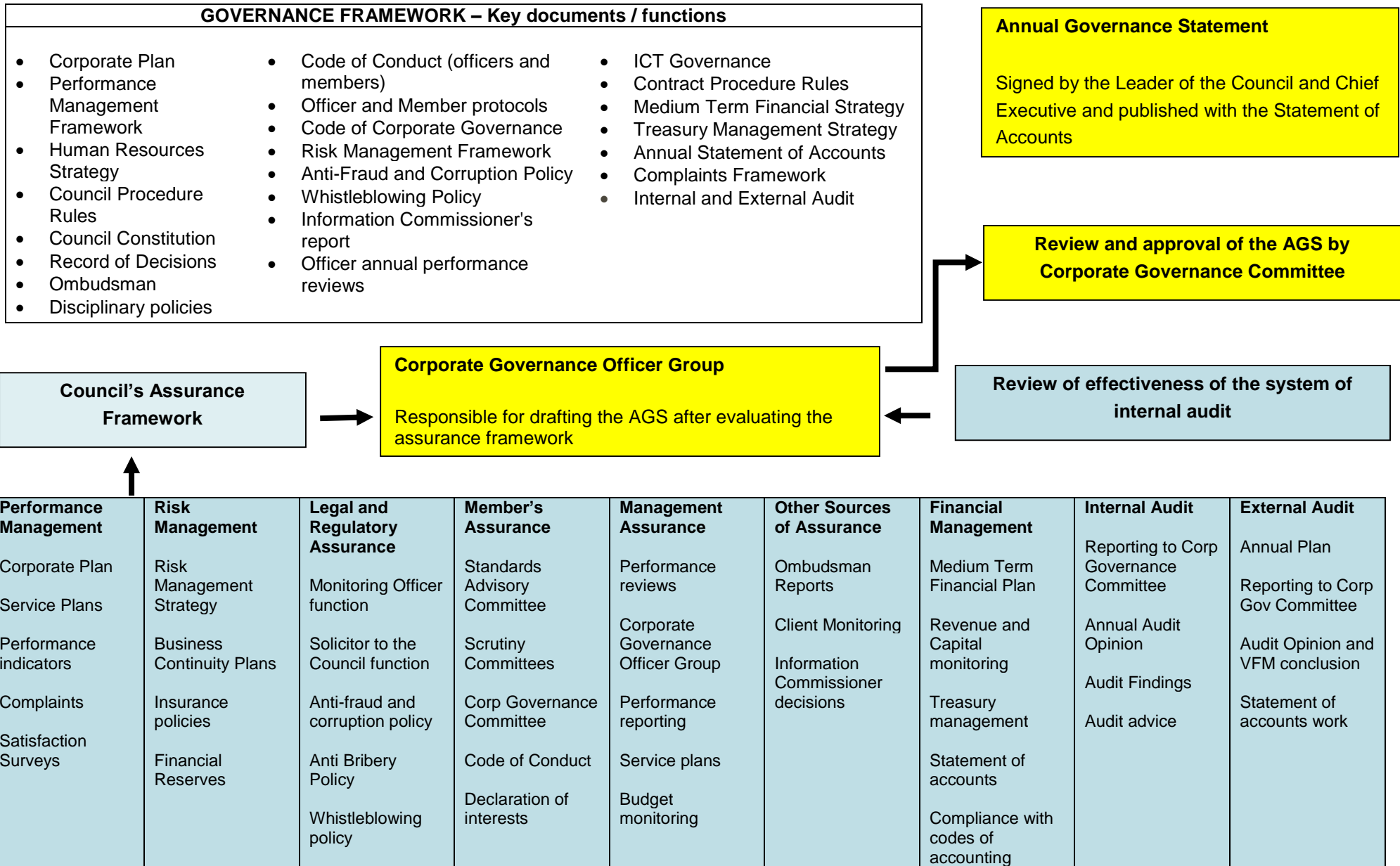
The various sources of assurance and the process leading to the creation of the Annual Governance Statement is illustrated on page 3 of this document.

This Annual Governance Statement provides an account of the processes, systems and records in place during 2014/15 which demonstrate assurance for the effectiveness of the framework of governance of the Borough Council to discharge its responsibilities.

Governance is about how local government bodies, such as the Council, ensure that they are doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner.

There are SIX core principles of governance adopted by the Council's Corporate Governance Committee which are used as reference points for the assurance about the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements. For each principle a table is provided within this document setting out what arrangements are in place and what assurance each provides.

AGS Process and Sources of Assurance Overview



Scope of Responsibility

Taunton Deane Borough Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

The Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, Taunton Deane Borough Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, including arrangements for the management of risk.

Taunton Deane Borough Council has approved and adopted a Code of Corporate Governance, which is consistent with the principles of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) Framework “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government”. A copy of the code can be obtained from The Monitoring Officer, Taunton Deane Borough Council, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton, TA1 1HE on request.

This statement explains how Taunton Deane Borough Council has complied with the code and also meets the requirements of regulation 4(3) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011 which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an annual governance statement.

The Governance Framework

In March 2008 the Council adopted a formal code of corporate governance in line with guidance provide by CIPFA/SOLACE.

These principles of good governance are:

1. Focusing on the purpose of the authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area;
2. Members and Officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles;
3. Promoting values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behavior;
4. Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risks;
5. Developing the capacity and capability of Members and Officers to be effective;
6. Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability.



The Purpose of the Governance Framework

The governance framework comprises the systems, processes, culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood and impact should those risks be realised and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The governance framework has been in place at Taunton Deane Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2015 and up to the date of approval of the statement of accounts.

1. Focusing on the purpose of the Council and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area.

How we have set out our vision and the outcomes we wish to achieve	Assurances Received
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members, working with officers, have developed a three year <u>Corporate Business Plan</u> (2013-2016) which describes the Council's priorities, key activities and intended outcomes for citizens and service users, our vision and our core values. This feeds into Service Plans, Team plans and personal plans. • Members and officers have created the <u>Taunton Growth Prospectus</u> which sets out a clear economic vision for Taunton over the period until 2028. • The Council has developed <u>The Core Strategy</u> which sets out a vision for Taunton Deane including strategic objectives, spatial strategy and policies for meeting that vision. • The Council has worked in partnership with key agencies and the local community to prepare the <u>Priority Areas Strategy</u> (2012-17)- The PAS sets out a number of projects that seek to tackle disadvantage and deprivation in the following localities:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - North Taunton (Priorswood, Lyngford and Wellsprings) - Taunton East (Halcon, Lane and Lambrook) - Rural Areas - Wellington <p>The Council has approved a Housing Revenue Account Business Plan which sets out new strategic objectives and outcomes for the service for the period 2012-2042.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Management Framework – the Council uses different performance measures (quality, outputs, value for money, customer satisfaction) to give an overview of Council performance and stimulate improvement. Information is published quarterly on our website in the form of reports and minutes against the corporate priorities and targets and reported to the Council's leadership team, Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committees for review and challenge; • Additional performance monitoring reports are also reviewed by the management team and Scrutiny committees (e.g Somerset Waste Partnership, Tone Leisure). • Externally reported data: Government Single Data List; • Internal Audit reports; • External Audit reports; • Employee annual review process linked to the Council's objectives. • Progress against the Growth programme is regularly reviewed by Taunton Economic Advisory Board and the Project Taunton Steering Group. • Progress updates against the HRA business plan is considered regularly by the Tenant Services Management Board. • Updates on progress against the Joint Management and Shared Service Business Plan provided to Corporate Scrutiny, 18th November 2014 and most recently on 26th March 2015, as well

Joint Management and Shared Service Business Plan created jointly between West Somerset Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council setting out how one team of officers would be created to support the two sovereign Councils and deliver significant savings to each.

as the project board and the Joint Partnership Advisory Panel (JPAG) .

2. Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles.

Source of assurance

The Council's Constitution defines and documents the roles and responsibilities of member and officer functions, with clear published delegation arrangements and protocols for decision making and communication.

The constitution is kept under review by the Constitutional Sub-Committee. All proposed changes are considered by the Corporate Governance Committee and Full Council. The Constitution was reviewed and updated in October 2014 to reflect the joint working arrangements between Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset District Council.

All officers have defined role descriptions which set out their personal roles and responsibilities.

There is a member/officer protocol that sets out the standards of behaviour expected to ensure an appropriate working relationship between members and officers (page 235 of the Council's Constitution).

Members work with officers to develop and approve the Corporate Plan, setting out the Council's priorities. Officers use the Corporate Plan to align service delivery with the Council's priorities and regularly report progress to the Executive.

Portfolio holders and the shadow portfolio holders meet key officers on a regular basis to discuss relevant issues within their portfolio.

The Group Leaders, Chief Executive and other relevant key officers meet regularly to share information and discuss any issues for the authority.

The Leader and Chief Executive meet regularly in order to maintain a shared understanding of roles and objectives.

A 'One Team' newsletter is produced monthly and is issued to all officers and Members highlighting successes, emerging issues, corporate messages in order that both Members and officers share a common understanding of key issues affecting the organisation.

Members and officers work jointly on advisory and steering groups in respect of key corporate projects (e.g. growth, Transformation).

Member induction programme in place for new members.

Officer induction programme for new employees to ensure they have knowledge of the organisation, its values and priorities.

The Chief Executive's annual appraisal is undertaken as per the agreed process.

Service plans are clearly linked to the corporate plan and the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), both of which are developed between Members and officers. They provide detail about the key actions to be undertaken to deliver on the corporate priorities. They also identify the performance measures and targets to ensure services achieve their objectives and to the required standard.

3. Promoting the values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behavior.

Source of assurance	Where found
External Audit of Accounts	
Members and staff Codes of Conduct	<u>Constitution</u>
Scheme of Delegation	<u>Constitution</u>
Anti-fraud and Corruption Policy	Website

Anti-bribery policy	Website
Financial Regulations	Constitution
Standing Orders on Procurement and Contracts	Constitution
Register of Member Interests	Website – included as part of the personal details for each Member
Register of Officer Interests	Refreshed annually -held by Democratic Services in paper format
Corporate Complaints Policy	Website
Investigation and disciplinary procedures – During 2014/15 there were 8 Disciplinary cases which resulted in 1 written warning, two final written warnings and one dismissal , no further action taken in respect of the remaining cases.	Disciplinary policy held on TDBC Intranet – HR pages
Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2014	Available from the Comments and Complaints page of our website
Whistleblowing Policy - The Council has in place arrangements for individuals to raise concerns where they believe that staff do not demonstrate the expected core values and behaviours.	Website
The Council set values for the organisation and publish these within our Corporate Plan.	Corporate Business Plan on our website
The Standards committee exists to promote and maintain high standards on Councillors and co-opted members through assisting Councillors to observe the member's Code of Conduct and monitoring the operation of the Code – during 2014/15 there were there were 7 complaints about Members dealt with in 2014/15; 5 related to parish/town councillors and two to TDBC councillors.	Constitution & Our Website

4. Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and risk management arrangements

Source of assurance	Where found
<p>Taunton Deane Borough Council has a published Constitution that sets out the decision-making arrangements and the responsibilities for different functions. There are clear rules of procedure for the running of business meetings and details of delegated authorities to individuals. The Monitoring Officer is responsible for the Constitution.</p>	<p><u>Constitution</u></p>
<p>Corporate Scrutiny and Community Scrutiny Committees were set up in 2009 and can scrutinise matters to be considered by committees or the Council in order to provide challenge to decisions to be made or policies to be adopted.</p>	<p><u>Constitution</u></p>
<p>The Executive has a published Forward Plan of Decisions to be taken and meets on a monthly basis. The Forward Plan was amended in line with the Local Authority (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 and includes a column to indicate where it is anticipated that confidential items are likely to be discussed and allows for representations to be made to state why a decision should not be made in private session.</p>	<p>Our <u>Website</u></p>
<p>Protocol on decision making - The Council issues and keeps an up to date a record of what part of the Council or individual has responsibility for particular types of decisions or decisions relating to particular areas or functions</p>	<p><u>Constitution</u></p>
<p>The Council maintains an internal audit service through the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) that operates to standards specified by the institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants (CIPFA). Auditors test compliance with good practice and internal policies and procedures, reporting their findings to officers and to the Councils Corporate Governance Committee.</p>	<p><u>Southwest Audit Partnership</u></p>

All reports to Council or committee contain a section relating to risk which ensures known risks are considered as part of the decision making process	Our website
All reports to Council or committee contain a section relating to legal implications which ensures legal opinion is considered as part of the decision making process	Our website
All reports to Council or committee contain a section relating to finance implications which ensures financial implications are considered as part of the decision making process	Our website
Monitoring Officer and the Solicitor to the Council– responsible for ensuring the legality of the actions of the Council and promoting good standards of ethical and corporate governance.	Roles defined in the Constitution
Council meetings are open to the public (with the exception of items that are exempt under the Access to Information Act). The Council advertises meetings, communicate decisions and minutes to ensure they are publicly available in a timely manner.	Constitution & Our website
A call-in mechanism is in place in relation to challenging decisions made by the Executive which allows re-consideration and further debate of the issue.	Constitution
TDBC operates a Corporate Governance Committee which is independent of the Executive and Scrutiny functions of the Council. Corporate Governance covers a wide remit and deal with such things as health and safety, risk management, recommend changes to the Constitution in addition to receiving any audit reports given to the Authority.	Constitution & Our website
Monthly Budget monitoring by budget holders and quarterly finance reporting to Members helps ensure an accurate position of the Council's finances is available when financial decisions are made.	Internal via the Council's shared 'W' drive and Our website
Basic open data information required under the Transparency Code is available on the Council's website to aid transparency of the operation and conduct of the Council.	Our website
Freedom of Information / Environmental Information Regulations permitting scrutiny of information held by the Council of any matter (subject to exceptions and exemptions)	Our website

<p>A Tenants Services Management Board has been set up, whose members include tenants and Councillors. This board holds the Housing Service to account including performance and expenditure and helps shape the direction of the service.</p>	<p>Agendas and minutes available on our website</p>
<p>Progress of the growth programme is regularly reviewed by the Taunton Economic Advisory Board – which includes various key stakeholders from the local business and public sector, providing independent advice to TDBC, and overseeing the strategic economic development of the Borough</p> <p>Project Taunton Steering Group - TDBC Members only, with a particular focus on Taunton Town Centre regeneration.</p>	

5. Developing the capacity and capability of members and officers to be effective in their roles

<p>Source of assurance</p>
<p>Staff have an annual appraisal meeting with their manager. Performance is reviewed and an action plan for the next period is set. This assists the member of staff in the performance of their work, helps to develop their skills and identifies any training needs as well as identifying how their role sits with the delivery of Corporate Priorities.</p>
<p>Southwest Audit Partnership (SWAP) in conjunction with Devon Audit Partnership Audit committee provided training 3 Oct 2014 at Sparkford Motor Museum & 10 Oct 2014 at Buckfast Abbey, Devon. The invite was issued to all Corporate Governance committee members.</p>
<p>A corporate training programme is in place covering a variety of skills and knowledge to help officers become more effective.</p>

On the 8 and 9 April 2014 Councillors William Nunn and David Tutt(both LGA Peers) visited the Council and worked with Members and officers to develop a framework for the Member Development programme. The key findings from this work suggested that the two Councils (West Somerset DC and Taunton Deane BC) should look at joint training opportunities for both sets of members. Councillor Gill Slattery from Taunton Deane Borough Council and Councillor Peter Murphy from West Somerset Council were appointed as Member Champions on Member Development.

With assistance from the LGA, Member Champions and Officers undertook an initial desk top exercise to look at other Councils who had either worked in partnership and/or transformed their services, to see if there was any relevant learning for Taunton Deane and West Somerset.

Taking on board the importance of communicating with Members, a OneTeam newsletter has been produced monthly which is sent to all Members and staff and contains, amongst other things, information relating to the implementation of the joint working business case and this has been extremely well received. In addition, a Joint Programme Advisory Group consisting of five elected Members from Taunton Deane and West Somerset Councils has met regularly and proved an effective vehicle for keeping Councillors advised of progress and disseminating that information where necessary.

Member Development Events held :

28 April 2014 – New Joint Management Team presented their staff restructuring proposals

3 July 2014 – representatives from Breckland Council and Eastbourne Borough Council gave presentations on their respective Authorities' approach to transformation

15 September 2014 – members of Taunton Deane and West Somerset Council's Joint Programme Advisory Group (JPAG) and senior officers met with the Chief Executive, Finance Director, Head of Change and Members from West Dorset DC /Weymouth & Portland BC in order to learn more about Council working together and sharing resource and how they have approached service transformation.

2 October 2014 – the Leader of Eastbourne Borough Council gave a more detailed and practically based presentation on how the Council had transformed its services, particularly through the use of technology

17 February 2015 – representatives from West Devon and South Hams Councils gave a presentation on their journey through shared services to transformation and the Chief Executive of Exeter City Council gave a presentation on the City's Journey to increasing its economic prosperity and regional status.

There was a Joint Member discussion at the workshop on 17 February 2015 giving those Members present the opportunity to set out any thoughts that could be taken forward after the May 2015 election.

6. Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability

Source of assurance	Where found (if applicable)
Greater corporate use of Social Media – a TDBC Twitter account has been created and has shown a significant increases in ‘followers’ during the year and an approved Social Media Policy is in place.	Twitter @ tdbc
The Council produces an Annual Statement of Accounts and publishes these on its website.	Audit of accounts page on Council website
Performance Management Framework – the Council uses different performance measures (quality, outputs, value for money, customer satisfaction) to give an overview of Council performance and stimulate improvement; information is published quarterly on our website in the form of reports and minutes against the corporate priorities and targets and reported to the Council’s leadership team, Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet for review and challenge. Local people can use performance information, to hold the council to account and have a bigger say on what happens in their communities.	Performance reports available on our website
Corporate Business Plan (2013-2016) which describes the Council’s priorities, key activities and intended outcomes for citizens and service users, our vision and our core values	See Corporate Business Plan on our website.
The Council Tax booklet shares details on the Council's financial position (i.e. a summary of the Statement of Accounts), priorities, and other useful information and is available on line and also available in paper format on request.	Council Tax booklet available on our website
Groups such as the Tenants Forum and Sheltered Housing Forum allow tenants to have a strong voice in ensuring accountability of the Housing service.	Tenants Forum minutes on Council website

<p>The Council encourages all types of feedback (complaints, compliments, comments & suggestions) from a number of channels (website, telephone, e-mail/letter, face-to-face), and these are logged on a central database for analysis and review.</p>	<p>Make a comment or complaint page of our website</p>
<p>The Weekly Bulletin is published every Thursday and gives details of the latest Council news and decisions. In it are details of future Committee meetings, decisions made by Councillors, the Mayors engagements, recent press releases. It is distributed to all Councillors and staff, the local media and some partner organisations including parish Councils.</p>	<p>Available on our website</p>
<p>Articles relating to The Council's vision and priorities are regularly communicated to the community through the Somerset County Gazette – using the 'Deane Dispatch' page.</p>	<p>Somerset County Gazette</p>
<p>An Annual Report highlighting the performance of the Council's Housing Services is sent to all of the Council's tenants and leaseholders</p>	<p>2014 report available on our website</p>
<p>Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2014 is published on our website setting out the number of complaints against the Council made to the Ombudsman in the previous year together with the outcome of those complaints.</p>	<p>Available from the Comments and Complaints page of our website</p>
<p>Annual satisfaction Survey introduced in 2014/15 and continued for 2015/16. Relatively low response rate in 2014/15 as was online only. For 2015/16 we have made paper surveys available as well and sent one out with every Council Tax bill in order to boost response rate. The results will be reported to the Executive and published on our website.</p>	<p>Survey on our website</p>
<p>The Council employs Community Development Officers whose roles are to engage with local communities in order to build skills and confidence and support individuals and communities to identify and articulate their needs and then develop their own solutions.</p>	<p>Community Development page of our website</p>
<p>The Council has a consultation policy and throughout the year officers continued to invite input through a wide range of community and business based groups. Public consultations are publicised on our website. Additionally an annual resident's survey is promoted via each the Council Tax bills we issue.</p>	<p>Current Consultations page of our website.</p>
<p>Regular News articles are placed on the home page of the TDBC Website promoting emerging issues and decisions.</p>	<p>News items on the home page of our website</p>

Revenues and Benefits Customer Forum – made up of the landlords, Council tax payers, business rate payers and Customers receiving Council Tax support and /or Housing benefit. The purpose of the Forum is to develop suggestions on how to address any issues customers have told us about and review and comment on any action plans we come up with to improve our service to customers.

Join the Revenues and Benefits Customer Forum page of our [website](#)

Council meetings are open to the public (with the exception of items that are exempt under the Access to Information Act). The Council advertises meetings in advance and publishes minutes of meeting held. However please refer to Action Plan on page 20 for improvement identified.

[Constitution](#) & Our [Website](#)

Review of Effectiveness

Taunton Deane Borough Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of its governance framework including the effectiveness of the system of internal control.

The review for the 2014/15 statement was carried out on 4th June 2015 by officers of the Corporate Officers Governance Group, made up of the Internal Audit Manager, Section 151 Officer, Monitoring Officer, Assistant Director Corporate Services and The Corporate Strategy & Performance Manager.

The review of the effectiveness is informed by senior managers within the Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, and also by the work of the internal auditors and external auditors

The opinion of the Internal Auditors was that overall the control environment was reasonable in 2014/15 (the opinion was also "reasonable" in 2013/14).

In its review of effectiveness, the Authority has assessed its overall governance arrangements remain adequate and fit for purpose.

Some areas where further improvements could be made have been identified and these have been included within the Action Plan (Appendix A) which we will seek to address during the 2015/16 financial year.

Certification

Over the coming year we will continue to enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps, shown within the Action Plan, will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

On behalf of Taunton Deane Borough Council:

Signed:
John Williams
Leader of the Council

Signed:
Penny James
Chief Executive

The review of our governance framework identified some areas where further improvements could be made. These are shown below. We will seek to address these during the 2015/16 financial year (April 2015 to March 2016).

Issue	Action	Who	When
Corporate Plan 1. The Council's current Corporate Plan expires April 2016.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refresh the Council's Corporate Priorities and Corporate Plan, re-focusing on the purpose of the Council and on outcomes for the community. Take through the democratic process and publicise through traditional and social media. 	Richard Sealy	Priorities – Oct 15 Plan – Feb 16
Transparency 2. There are currently delays in some committee meeting minutes being published on the Council's website which could impact upon the public's ability to effectively scrutinise decisions and hold the Council to account. 3. Requirement to meet increased transparency requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish minutes within 7 working days of the meeting – introduce an internal performance measure to track progress against this target. Add further open data to the Council's website to meet the requirements of the Transparency Code 2015 to meet the Government's desire to place more power into citizens' hands to increase democratic accountability and make it easier for local people to contribute to the local decision making process and help shape public services 	Bruce Lang Richard Sealy	By end July 15 By September 2015
Developing ONE TEAM working. 4. Ensuring staff have the knowledge and skills of key controls and governance process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a new staff Intranet, so there is a single repository of up to date policy and procedures which staff can easily access irrespective of their location. Develop a robust staff induction process for all staff in the One Team ways of working and behaviour. Deploy eLearning solution in order to deliver refresher training in DPA, FOI, Health and safety etc and have a real-time record of who has undertaken the training. 	Richard Sealy Richard Sealy Richard Sealy	Ongoing Dec 15 Early Sept 15

<p>Assurance</p> <p>5 Ensuring the 'basics' are in place within each team.</p>	<p>Initiate a process of assurance that the basics are in place across the One Team– for example regular team meetings, risk registers, appraisals etc</p>	<p>Richard Sealy</p>	<p>Oct 15</p>
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The following actions were identified within the 2013/14 Annual Governance Statement as matters which the Council sought to progress during 2014/15.

Action	Comment
<p>Strengthen Contractual Arrangements</p> <p>Address legacy arrangements that are in place where contracts have expired.</p> <p>Develop a process to keep the contracts register up to date to ensure it is an accurate reflection of the contracts in place.</p>	<p>Southwest One Strategic Procurement Service (SPS) have made good progress working with services in addressing situations where contracts have previously expired. The position is now 'stable' in this regard.</p> <p>A process is now in place to keep the contracts register up to date. There are triggers included within the database to indicate contracts approaching expiry and prompting communications between SPS and services providing appropriate lead time for action.</p>
<p>Creditors – purchase ordering and new creditor authorisation process</p> <p>Ensure vendor checks are undertaken to confirm change of details are correct.</p> <p>Retrospective Purchase orders still occur – address the ongoing issue from the previous year.</p>	<p>Checks are included in the standard business process to verify changes requested to vendor master data records. This includes a daily audit check of any set up and amendments by a supervising officer to review/sign off changes to records.</p> <p>The position regarding use of retrospective purchase orders remains.</p>
<p>Fraud</p> <p>Improve awareness of the approved Corporate Counter Fraud & Corruption Policy & Strategy</p>	<p>The council has approved an updated Corporate Counter-Fraud strategy in 2013, and has been successful in obtaining government grant to support the establishment of a new Southwest Counter-Fraud Partnership. The Partnership is planned to 'launch' in July 2015, and a key priority for 2015/16 will be for the Partnership to support the council through providing training and awareness raising of fraud risks and control systems.</p>

Action	Comment
<p>Information Governance</p> <p>Introduce a confidentiality code of practice</p>	<p>In light of the significant organisational changes which took place in 2014/15 this action was not progressed. The aim is to progress this during 2015/16.</p> <p>Whilst the Council does not have a specific Confidentiality Code of Practice it has a requirement in place for all new staff when signing their contract to of employment to comply with the Council's Employee Code of Conduct Policy and sign an IT security agreement before they are allowed access to TDBC's applications.</p>
<p>Priority Area Strategy (PAS)</p> <p>Improve clarity surrounding ownership of reviewing the outcomes of the PAS, bringing this information to a central point.</p> <p>Introduce a defined reporting structure to formally inform the dashboards.</p>	<p>Closed – will now be part of 'business as usual'. PAS performance monitoring has been agreed with the Taunton Deane Partnership Executive and Board (Spring 2014). We have developed a new outcome focused performance monitoring regime that will monitor both individual project progress and collective progress towards the delivery of the agreed 7 outcomes.</p>
<p>Equality and Diversity – compliance with requirements and duties.</p> <p>Monitor compliance and adherence to the TDBC Equalities Framework.</p> <p>Increase awareness of the TDBC framework and expectations (staff training and awareness).</p>	<p>Ongoing – Action plan created which will be monitored and reported on a 6-monthly basis & included in the JMT performance management sessions</p> <p>Much of this obligation is met through ensuring that our staff and members are properly trained on equalities and Angela Summers will be liaising with HR to ensure that appropriate training is in place on general equalities (all staff and members) and more detailed training for those who are required to complete Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs).</p> <p>There is an emphasis on all Assistant Directors (and our programme managers) to ensure that as we go about introducing transformation, new projects, savings plans, service changes etc that we properly consider the equalities impacts and make sure that we highlight those impacts so that members are clearly sighted on these when making their decisions and where possible we put in mitigating measures to reduce the impacts on groups with protected characteristics.</p> <p>Angela and her team will undertake a twice yearly audit of reports to Executive and Cabinet to quality check EIAs.</p>