

Title of Report:	Annual Governance Statement - Statement in Support by the Monitoring Officer
Report to be considered by:	Governance and Audit Committee
Date of Meeting:	1 September 2014
Forward Plan Ref:	GA2870

Purpose of Report: To provide evidence and independent verification of governance matters which may impact on the Annual Governance Statement from the viewpoint of the Monitoring Officer.

Recommended Action: To note the report.

Reason for decision to be taken: In accordance with CIPFA Guidance and current policy of the Council.

Other options considered: None

Key background documentation:

- Reports to Standards Committee relating to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct during 2013/2014
- Action plans relating to risk
- Updates to the constitution
- Other reports on potential impacts of legislation

The proposals will help achieve the following Council Strategy principle: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CSP8 - Doing what's important well The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Strategy principle by: Reviewing and providing assurance on the effectiveness of the Council's governance and other arrangements which may impact on the Annual Governance Statement.
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Governance and Audit Committee Chairman	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Quentin Webb – Tel (01635) 202646
E-mail Address:	qwebb@westberks.gov.uk
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	Full Annual Governance Statement report e-mailed to Councillor Roger Croft on 6 August 2014

Contact Officer Details	
Name:	David Holling
Job Title:	Head of Legal Services/Monitoring Officer
Tel. No.:	01635 519422
E-mail Address:	dholling@westberks.gov.uk

Implications

Policy:	Established as part of CIPFA guidance and reporting arrangements adopted by Council in connection with the Annual Governance Statement.
Financial:	No financial implication associated with this report.
Personnel:	N/A
Legal/Procurement:	In accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Acts 1972 and 2000 and the Local Government and Housing Act 1985 together with the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and Localism Act 2011.
Property:	N/A
Risk Management:	Insofar as is possible any risks have been assessed in accordance with the Risk Strategy.
Corporate Board's Recommendation:	Report to proceed to Management Board for consideration.

Is this item relevant to equality?	Please tick relevant boxes	Yes	No
Does the policy affect service users, employees or the wider community and:			
• Is it likely to affect people with particular protected characteristics differently?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Is it a major policy, significantly affecting how functions are delivered?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Will the policy have a significant impact on how other organisations operate in terms of equality?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to functions that engagement has identified as being important to people with particular protected characteristics?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to an area with known inequalities?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Outcome (Where one or more 'Yes' boxes are ticked, the item is relevant to equality)			
Relevant to equality - Complete an EIA available at www.westberks.gov.uk/eia			<input type="checkbox"/>
Not relevant to equality			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>
If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:		
The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval		<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council		<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position		<input type="checkbox"/>
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months		<input type="checkbox"/>
Item is Urgent Key Decision		<input type="checkbox"/>
Report is to note only		<input type="checkbox"/>

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As part of the Annual Governance statement, CIPFA guidance recommends that the S151 and Monitoring Officers give assurance that the Council's systems and procedures for which they have responsibility regarding internal controls are effective and being complied with. The Monitoring Officer looks at the legality of actions by bodies within the Council as part of duties under Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (the 1989 Act).

2. Proposals

- 2.1 Throughout the year the Governance and Audit Committee is referred to amendments to the Council's constitution and its rules of procedure where amendment is necessary. Subject to its view, matters are then referred to Council for adoption. This ensures that administrative processes remain effective, efficient and pertinent.
- 2.2 Ethics and matters of probity are dealt with by Standards Committee. The development of a complaints regime as regards complaints about District and Parish Members has been reviewed and updated following the Localism Act 2011. Members have been updated on changes to Standards arrangements and the processes for dealing with complaints.
- 2.3 Reviews of risk registers have been carried out by the Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer in their roles as members of the Council's Corporate Board. In addition, liabilities likely to impact upon the Council's operations from a legal perspective where appropriate have been identified.

3. Equalities Impact Assessment Outcomes

- 3.1 There is no decision to be made which impacts on Equality matters.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The Monitoring Officer's view of the Council's governance arrangements are that they are robust and effective. There has been no necessity to report formally to Council under Section 5 of the 1989 Act. Ethical matters are managed by the Standards Committee. The report is to be noted.

Executive Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As part of the Annual Governance Statement, CIPFA guidance recommends that the Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer provide "a key source of assurance that the Council's systems and procedures of internal control which are in operation are effective, efficient and being complied with". In essence this requires the Monitoring Officer, as the Officer charged with ensuring that the Council, and every part of it, acts legally and is not acting in a manner thought to constitute maladministration or injustice. In addition, the Chief Financial Officer/S151 Officer similarly ensures that all parts of the Council act in accordance with the budgetary and policy requirements in connection with the setting of the budget and financial administration standards within the Council.
- 1.2 This report reviews the Annual Governance Statement and its requirements, in particular relating to ethical and probity matters, any changes to the Constitution regarding regulation and guidance, together with an assessment of risks and liabilities.

2. The Role of the Monitoring Officer

- 2.1 Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 requires the Monitoring Officer to prepare a formal report to full Council where it appears that the Council, a committee or an Officer has acted or is likely to act illegally, or in a manner such as to constitute maladministration or injustice. The Monitoring Officer's role in essence is to ensure the legality of local governance arrangements based upon statutory requirements and guidance from Government and other outside bodies. As mentioned above, this role complements that of the Section 151 Officer and the Head of Paid Service (the Chief Executive) whose roles are also established by statute. The Monitoring Officer is part of the Council's Corporate Board and attends meetings of the Finance and Governance Group which looks at use of resources and has taken on the role of reviewing the constitution in a systematic way. If changes are necessary due to legislative impacts or administrative arrangements these are reported to Corporate Board, the Governance and Audit Committee and ultimately Council for member adoption. The process is open and transparent.
- 2.2 The formal report process under Section 5 is one which should be approached with extreme caution and should not be undertaken lightly. If such action is proposed it is generally the view that outside advice from Counsel should be sought by the Monitoring Officer. During 2013/14 there have been no reports or investigations necessary which fall within the requirements of Section 5 of the 1989 Act.
- 2.3 The Monitoring Officer's advice has been sought in connection with a number of day-to-day administrative matters and in particular advice in connection with the Code of Conduct for Members and Officers. Training has been provided for Members and Officers on the Council's Code of Conduct and Officer Code. In addition support regarding the Code has been provided for Town and Parish Councils and on occasion for individual parishes following recommendations from Standards Committee if considered appropriate.

3. Robustness of corporate governance arrangements

- 3.1 As Members will be aware, the Governance and Audit Committee considers reports throughout the year regarding certain amendments which have been required in connection with changes to the Constitution.
- 3.2 During 2010/11 following an audit of the Constitution and its processes the Finance and Governance Group of Officers which includes the Monitoring Officer, S151 Officer, Chief Internal Auditor and Head of Strategic Support began a systematic review of each part of the Constitution. This process has resulted in a number of changes to various parts some brought about due to legislative changes and others as a result of administrative arrangements within the Council. This process continued into 2013/14 and has taken into account The Localism Act 2011 which introduced changes at various levels within the Council.
- 3.3 This systematic review of the Constitution ensures that the Council's administrative arrangements remain effective and efficient bearing in mind changes imposed by government and other bodies as well as improving transparency and openness. This process was recognised as good best practice during the recent LGA Peer Review.

4. Ethics & Probity

- 4.1 As in previous years, ethics and probity matters were considered by the Council's Standards Committee. Advice for Members of West Berkshire Council and Parish and Town Councils on the Code has been given in order that the Council fulfils its role as "Responsible Authority" under the Local Government Act 2000 and the Localism Act 2011.
- 4.2 Whilst there were complaints and references to the Standards Committee throughout 2013/14 few required full investigation and have reduced which may be due to better behaviour or as a result of the lack of sanctions available under the standards regime. Complaints have been considered at local level and will continue to be governed under the revised Standards regime introduced by the Council under the 2011 Act.
- 4.3 The number of complaints has remained relatively static. The Council's website provides a complaints form and provides a detailed process to deal with breaches of the Codes of Conduct adopted at District and Parish level.

5. Implementation of Action Plans from Strategic Risk Register

- 5.1 All strategic risks are placed on a risk register and reviewed by Corporate Board and Management Board throughout the year. All major risks were considered by individual groups of Officers dealing with particular projects and actions arising from the "red risks" on service risk registers have been reviewed to ensure that the council's risks items are considered at the highest level. Both the Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer sit on the Corporate Board and attend Management Board.

6. Potential Liabilities

- 6.1 Whilst there have been cases considered by various courts during the year, none of these were of significance to warrant particular risks being identified. There have been major cases in the Crown Court and judicial reviews of certain decisions.

These cases will be closely monitored by Legal staff and where appropriate referred to the relevant Risk Register. Overall there has been an increase in the number of instructions received by Legal Services from services throughout the Council.

- 6.2 There are outstanding cases where contingent liabilities have been identified by officers and risks recognised and moderated at Service and Council level by various actions.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 It is the Monitoring Officer's assessment that the Council's governance arrangements are robust and effective. As a result of regular reviews of legislation, changes to processes and procedures are covered off either by Governance and Audit Committee or the Standards Committee. The Constitution and its associated rules are reviewed to ensure they are up to date. There have been no formal reports required by either the Monitoring Officer or S151 Officer to Council under the relevant legislation. Ethical matters relating to probity are being managed on a day to day basis by the Monitoring Officer and the Standards Committee. The Risk Register does not highlight any specific legal or procedural matters which require investigation.

Appendices

There are no Appendices to this report.

Consultees

Local Stakeholders: N/a

Officers Consulted: Andy Day; Ian Priestley; Andy Walker; Corporate Board

Trade Union: N/a