

West Lancashire Borough Council



Local Code of Governance

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INTRODUCTION

The contents of this Code have been developed by drawing on the CIPFA/Solace publication “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework” and associated guidance, which set out “proper practice” for the publication of an Annual Governance Statement as required by Regulation 4 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 (as amended).

The Council has in place arrangements to govern its activities with the aim of ensuring that it is doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner.

These are comprised of the systems, processes, priorities, cultures and values by which it is directed and controlled and through which it accounts to, engages with and, where appropriate, leads its communities.

The Council’s governance framework brings together underlying legislative requirements, governance principles and management processes that enable it to pursue its vision effectively, as well as underpinning that vision with mechanisms for control and management of risk.

The publication of this document is intended to make the Council’s governance processes more transparent and increase accountability to all of the Council’s stakeholders.

The CIPFA/SOLACE framework recommends that the Council tests its arrangements against the framework principles by:

- Developing and maintaining an up to date local code of governance
- Reviewing existing governance arrangements against it
- Preparing a governance statement in which they publicly report how they have monitored their governance arrangements in the year, the extent to which they comply with their own code and any planned changes to it.

This Local Code and governance arrangements will be reviewed annually and a Governance Statement will be published each year in conjunction with its financial reports.

THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

The CIPFA/SOLACE framework sets out how good governance can be recognised by adherence to six core principles with associated supporting principles.

The six core principles are set out below in bold together with the supporting principles which underpin them:

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

Exercising strategic leadership by developing and clearly communicating the authority's purpose and vision and its intended outcomes for citizens and service users

Ensuring that users receive a high quality of service whether directly, or in partnership, or by commissioning

Ensuring that the authority makes best use of resources and that tax payers and service users receive excellent value for money

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

Ensuring effective Leadership throughout the Authority and being clear about executive and non-executive functions and the roles and responsibilities of the scrutiny function

Ensuring that a constructive working relationship exists between authority Members and Officers and that the responsibilities of authority Members and Officers are carried out to a high standard

Ensuring relationships between the authority and the public are clear so each knows what to expect of the other

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

Ensuring authority Members and Officers exercise leadership by behaving in ways that exemplify high standards of conduct and effective governance

Ensuring that organisational values are put into practice and are effective

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

Being rigorous and transparent about how decisions are taken and listening and acting on the outcome of constructive scrutiny

Having good-quality information, advice and support to ensure that services are delivered effectively and are what the community wants/needs

Ensuring that an effective risk management system is in place

Using their legal powers to the full benefit of the citizens and communities in their area.

5. Developing the capacity and capability of Members to be effective.

Making sure that Members and Officers have the skills, knowledge, experience and resources they need to perform well in their roles

Developing the capability of people with governance responsibilities and evaluating their performance, as individuals and as a group

Encouraging best use of individuals' skills and resources in balancing continuity and renewal.

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

Exercising leadership through a robust scrutiny function which effectively engages local people and all local institutional stakeholders, including partnerships, and develops constructive accountability relationships

Taking an active and planned approach to dialogue with and accountability to the public to ensure effective and appropriate service delivery whether directly by the authority, in partnership or by commissioning

Making best use of human resources by taking an active and planned approach to meet responsibility to staff.

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THE COUNCIL'S APPROACH TO THE APPLICATION OF THE SIX PRINCIPLES

Implementing a Vision for the Area

The Council's longer term vision and priorities are reviewed annually to ensure that they remain relevant. A statement of the vision, values and priorities is made available publicly in a number of formats.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES 2012/15

The Council's vision is to be a Council to be proud of – delivering services that are lean, local and fair

OUR VALUES

We will deliver our vision by continuing to be an innovative organisation which:

- Prioritises customers and the services that are most important to quality of life;
- Work as 'one council' to provide a joined up approach;
- Is open and accountable in the way that it makes decisions;
- Develops and values employees;
- Promotes equality and diversity; and
- Works in partnership to benefit the Borough

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OUR PRIORITIES

Our values underpin the way in which we will deliver our priorities and achieve our vision. Our corporate priorities over the next three years

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(2012/13-2014/15) are:

- Balancing the budget and providing the best possible services within the resources available;
- Focusing upon sustainable regeneration and growth within the Borough;
- Caring for our Borough – delivering the small improvements that can make a big difference;
- Minimising uncertainty for staff and stakeholders by continuing to implement a managed approach to change; and
- Exploring innovation as a means to secure further value for money.

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Subject to affordability, our Service Priorities for the next three years (2012/13-2014/15) are:

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- Protect and improve the environment and keep our streets clean and tidy;
- Combat crime and the fear of crime;

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- Work to create opportunities for and retain good quality jobs in particular for local people;
- Improve housing and deliver housing that meets the needs of local people, including affordable housing; and
- Provide opportunities for leisure and culture that together with other council services contribute to healthier communities

PERFORMANCE

We manage our performance by using performance indicators to highlight any areas of concern at the earliest opportunity. We also manage performance against a number of Priority Delivery projects (those identified in the Business Plan as being the most important in terms of achieving the Council's priorities). We do this by monitoring progress against key milestones and targets.

The Coalition Government has removed the duty for Local Authorities to report performance against a suite of National Indicators. The DCLG has issued a 'Single Data Set'. This comprises all of the information that the Government requires Local Authorities to report to its Departments. Departments use this information for their own performance management purposes and not, as has been the case in the past, as a means to judge the performance of individual Local Authorities.

The purpose of this is to allow Local Authorities to develop local performance frameworks tailor made to their own area's needs and priorities. West Lancashire Borough Council now has an agreed suite of Corporate Performance Indicators that are aimed at doing just that – they are key to monitoring and thereby managing the Council's performance in achieving the aims of the Business Plan. They are monitored annually and, where appropriate, quarterly by Members.

These are supplemented by other operational and management indicators/measures (the "local" PIs) which reflect our corporate priorities and are monitored regularly by Senior Management, Portfolio Holders and within the individual service areas.

The Council's Business Plan 2011-15 is supported by a Delivery Plan which details key projects, milestones and targets. This is monitored regularly by both Chief Officers and Members. Progress against the Delivery Plan, which also contains key overarching targets for the Council, will be reported yearly to Members, partners and the public through an Annual Report.

Indicators are managed and monitored within the Council's performance management system, Covalent. Indicators are linked to Service Priorities, Key Projects and Service Action Plans, which are also managed through the Covalent system.

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Excellent progress has been made towards completing our priority delivery projects over the last 12 months and we will continue to pursue them in 2012/13 by:

Working with the County Council and other partners to deliver support for enterprise and the generation of funding and inward investment to the Borough

Implementing the MSR 2012/13 policy options and undertaking further MSRs in 2013/14 and 2014/15

Monitoring the implementation of the new JVC partnership with LCC and OneConnect Ltd in relation to HR, Revenues and Benefits and ICT Services to ensure their success

Progressing the Skelmersdale Vision Town Centre Action Plan in partnership with the Homes and Community Agency and St Modwen

Delivering a Self Financing Business Plan for Housing

Delivering an adopted Local Plan to provide the basis of a sustainable Borough going forward

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Internal and External Audit regularly examine performance indicators as part of their review work.

GOVERNANCE

The Council has in place a Protocol which sets out how the essential elements of local governance, accountability and transparency will be maintained within any proposed arrangements for service delivery through partnerships.

A Medium Term Financial Forecast and Treasury Management Strategy and Policy are maintained which fully assess the potential financial risks facing the Council.

The Council follows and complies with CIPFA's Code on a Prudential Framework for Local Authority Capital Finance and CIPFA's Treasury Management Code.

Advice from Statutory Officers, along with Member input, plays a key part in the decision making process of the Council to ensure the effective use of resources and achievement of objectives.

The Council has in place a clearly defined complaints process which enables it to identify and learn from any failings in service delivery.

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Deleted: West Lancashire Local Strategic Partnership's (LSP) Sustainable Community Strategy 2007-17 was launched at the LSP Annual Conference in 2007. The strategy provides a framework for improving the wellbeing of our local communities through a vision, agreed objectives and a set of priority projects. The SCS was refreshed last year in 2011 to ensure that the LSP's priorities and work programme continue to be targeted at the areas of greatest need and where a partnership approach will be the most effective solution.

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The Roles of Members and Officers

The Council's [Constitution](#) clearly sets out the respective roles and responsibilities of the Council, its Executive and Overview and Scrutiny functions, and delegations to Committees, Portfolio Holders and Chief Officers as well as those functions which by statute are to be exercised by a designated "Proper Officer". It also delineates the Council's Management Structure.

Field Code Changed

As part of the Constitution the Council has agreed a Protocol on Member/Officer Relations and Conventions for the Management of Council Business.

Promoting High Standards of Conduct

As part of the Constitution the Council has adopted the Members' Code of Conduct and an Officer's Code of Conduct. The Council has a Standards Committee whose role is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by councillors and co-opted members.

The Council's Human Resources team lead and monitor on Equality issues. An Equality Scheme Action Plan 2011-14 is in place to ensure the Council conforms with the Equality Act 2010 requirements. 'Approach to Equality' and

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'Equality in Employment' documents are available to all staff and an Equality and Diversity Corporate Steering Group meets periodically to monitor compliance.

SERVICE STANDARDS

We have a number of core customer service standards which apply to all customers and staff. These corporate customer care standards provide a clear commitment of our desire to attain an effective and consistent customer service making our services easier to understand and access; they include responses to letters and emails, telephone calls, complaints, visits to our offices, visits to customer's homes and out of hours emergencies; they cover targets and the attitude and behaviour of staff and customers.

We are committed to improving, front-line services for residents and visitors to the Borough. To underline this we also have a set of service standards for each key front-line service, available on the Council's [Website](#), which are linked to our priorities.

Informed, Transparent Decision Making

The Council publishes Forward Plans which set out those executive decisions it knows it will be considering in advance for the information of interested stakeholders. In addition, appropriate notice of meetings of Council bodies is given together with the publication of the agenda and all available reports.

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It has arrangements in place to ensure that conflicts of interest for members and officers are explicitly identified and dealt with before decisions are taken.

Guidance for report authors sets out matters which must be explicitly considered in the production of any report, including financial, resource and equality implications. These provide documentary evidence of the rationale behind any recommendations.

All decisions of the Council, Cabinet and Committees are formally minuted. Information about the Council's Committees including membership, meeting timetables, Agendas and Minutes can be accessed through the Council's [Committee Information System](#)

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The Council has adopted a formal Risk Management Strategy and process which is fully embedded throughout the Authority and forms an integral part of the management process. A dedicated resource is committed to this area of work to ensure consistency and compliance throughout the Authority.

Guidance on effective internal financial controls are detailed within the Council's Financial Regulations.

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The Council has in place a Data Quality [Protocol](#) to ensure the accuracy, [relevance](#) and reliability of data produced [for use by internal and external stakeholders](#).

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Developing Capacity to act Effectively

The Managing Director (People and Places), takes a leading role in developing Members of the Council through the Member Development Commission. The Managing Director (Transformation), through the HR [service](#), develops Officers through the Development Appraisal Scheme which enables them to continue delivering high quality services.

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Audit and Governance Committee Members receive training, in both financial and non financial matters, to support them in their role.

Engaging with Local People and Stakeholders

West Lancashire Borough Council is committed to consulting local people and we are keen to gather your views. The Council has a consultation diary in the ["Your Views"](#) section of its website. This provides information on recent, current and future consultation activities as well as information on how you can get involved.

The "Duty to involve", is a statutory requirement for all Councils which came into effect in April 2009 aimed at ensuring people have greater opportunities to have their say. The Council has devised an Action Plan for Corporate Consultation in response to the requirements of the Duty.

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