

Local Code of Corporate Governance

2023/24



Introduction

Governance in the public sector can be described as the arrangements put in place to ensure that the intended outcomes for stakeholders are achieved while acting in the public interest at all times. In simple terms it is about:

How the Council operates to ensure it is doing the right things in the right way

Our governance arrangements are based on a series of principles*, as shown in the diagram below:



Source: CIPFA / SOLACE framework – *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government* (2016)

To explain this further:

Achieving the intended outcomes (doing the right thing) requires arrangements for:

- Being clear about what the Council wants to achieve for people, the environment and the economy

- Being clear about the actions needed to achieve the Council’s aims
- Making sure the Council has the skills, ability and money to achieve its’ aims
- Making sure the Council manages risks, budgets and performance
- Making sure that the Council operates in an open, accountable and transparent way

All of the above mean the Council needs to have in place ways to ensure the Council is acting in the public interest (doing it the right way). This means the Council needs to:

- Behave with integrity and demonstrate a strong commitment to ethical values and respect the rule of law
- Ensure the Council is open and engaged with our communities and stakeholders

As an example:

The Council’s One Coventry Plan is how we define the outcomes we are planning to achieve (Principle C)...



.....And in developing our plan we have engaged with people across the city using a variety of different methods (Principle A)



Our work is underpinned by the One Coventry Values (Principles A, E)



Our Local Code of Corporate Governance sets out our arrangements for meeting the principles, helping us to ensure that we deliver our intended outcomes and are accountable to those who live, work and visit Coventry. The law requires us to undertake an annual review to reflect on how well our governance arrangements have been operating in practice during the year and provide an opinion on this.

This is published in our Annual Governance Statement. The Statement also includes a plan of any actions we are taking to improve governance. The Council is committed to continuous improvement and we recognise that good governance is dynamic - as things change, the way in which we work needs to change as well to ensure that we can continue to do the right things in the right way.

The full Local Code of Governance for Coventry City Council is outlined in this document. The Code is reviewed every year and approved by the Audit and Procurement Committee to ensure its up-to-date and accurately reflects how the Council operates.

Principle A:

Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

1. Behaving with integrity

The Council has a Code of Conduct for Elected Members. The aim of the Code of Conduct is to create and maintain public confidence in the role of Elected Members, Co-opted Members and local government. It sets out general principles of behaviour expected of all Elected Members and Co-opted Members. It provides a guide to modelling the behaviour that is expected and covers standards including respect; bullying, harassment and discrimination; confidentiality and use of position as well as arrangements for declaring interests. Elected Members receive training on the Code of Conduct.

There is a Code of Conduct in place for Employees which forms part of their terms and conditions of employment and is based on the Seven Principles of Public Life.

Our 'One Coventry Values' have been co-created with the support and input of all employees across the Council so they are reflective of how we want to be represented both as colleagues and to the wider community. The One Coventry Values are "Open and Fair", "Nurture and Develop", "Engage and Empower", "Create and Innovate", "Own and Be Accountable" and "Value and Respect".

A Supplier Code of Conduct has been approved and communicated to suppliers and work continues to embed the Code to ensure providers of goods and services act with integrity with respect for individuals and the environment.

2. Demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values

The Council has an Ethics Committee who promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and co-opted members. The Ethics Committee monitor the operation of the Code of Conduct for Elected and Co-opted Members, consider complaints made against Elected and Co-opted Members, and monitor the operation of the Code of Conduct for employees.

There is a register of Interests for Members which can be viewed on the website. Officers are expected to declare financial and non-financial interests to their line manager and the Council undertakes an annual declarations of interest exercise in relation to all officers Grade 9 and above.

Gifts and hospitality are declared. The Ethics Committee review Members' and Officers' declarations of gifts and hospitality every 6 months. These are published as part of the Ethics Committee papers.

A Member Officer Protocol offers guidance on some of the issues which are commonly experienced between Members and Officers when working together. Officers and Members both serve the public, but they have different roles. Officers are employees of the Council and are politically neutral. Their role is to advise Members and implement the policies of the Council to the best of their abilities. Members are office holders and will often belong to a political party. They are obliged to exercise their own judgement in respect of matters before them but may also legitimately pursue party political objectives. Employees are answerable to the Chief Executive, not to individual Members (whatever office they hold), but there should be good communication between senior officers and Members with special responsibility for their area of work.

3. Respecting the Rule of Law

The Council's Constitution sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. The Council has three statutory posts who are responsible for ensuring the rule of law, as set out in the Constitution is applied – The Chief Executive, Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer. There is a Monitoring Officer Protocol in place.

The Council has a Whistleblowing Policy. This enables employees to report concerns about wrongdoing which are in the public interest. This policy is important as it protects the individual who raised the concerns from suffering any detriment. There is also information on the staff intranet which advises employees how they can raise concerns about work (including Whistleblowing), entitled "I have a concern".

A Group Governance Agreement is in place which sets out the legal framework for the operation and management of Coventry Municipal Holdings Ltd and its subsidiaries. Coventry Municipal Holdings Ltd and the Council's Joint Venture companies are accountable to the Coventry Shareholder Committee which represents the interests of the Council as shareholder.

Principle B:

Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

1. Openness

Meetings are open to the public and information is displayed on our website. A weekly public notice is published and displayed at the Council House. Papers are published on the website five working days before a meeting and wherever possible, items are discussed in public. If items are discussed in private, a reason is given for this.

Key Decisions (those which involve financial implications of over £1m or impact substantially on two or more Wards) are published.

Decisions taken by Cabinet and Member Committees are available on the website.

2. Engaging with citizens and stakeholders

The Council engages with citizens/residents and stakeholders in a variety of ways including our website and social media. We also publish a magazine, Citivision, which is delivered to every house in the city and includes news, views and features about the work of the Council and life in Coventry. The magazine includes information about how you can get in touch with your local councillors and reports on the many events taking place in the city.

The Let's Talk Coventry website is an online platform designed for residents to engage with the Council. You can use it to take part in consultations and surveys, share ideas and join in with discussions. We also use the site to keep residents and stakeholders up to date with how your feedback has led to action from the council.

Information on comments, compliments and complaints is on our website on the speak up, we're listening section. The Council is committed to putting local people and their needs at the heart of what it does. We want to ensure that people have a positive and trouble-free experience with us in all transactions and interactions. However, sometimes things go wrong. When things go wrong, we encourage people to speak up, so that we can make things right.

The Council has a network of Community Messengers who share information with community and resident groups, as well as a Community Resilience Team, whose role is to develop community initiatives with local people.

The Council has a Faith Partnership which is a joint commitment between faith communities and Coventry City Council to a set of principles that guide engagement, aiming to improve collaborative partnerships, and to promote open, practical working at all levels.

Principle C:

Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

1. Defining outcomes

The Council defines its outcomes in the One Coventry Plan – this is our strategic, corporate plan. The One Coventry Plan is focussed on the needs and aspirations of our communities. It also contains the One Coventry Performance Framework which contains the targets we will be working to deliver. Members and senior officers regularly monitor how well the Council is delivering work towards meeting the targets. The Cabinet take a report every six months on progress toward target. These reports are published and are discussed publicly.

2. Sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

The One Coventry Plan focusses on economic, social and environmental benefits. The Plan is underpinned by a number of strategies which help us to deliver the plan. This includes the Medium Term Financial Strategy (which helps us to plan our spending over a three year period), the Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Every decision making report contains information on how the decision will impact on people and the environment. For significant policy changes full Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken.

The Council has a Social Value and Sustainability Policy. This means that we look at maximising the wider benefit for our city through meeting our needs when we purchase goods and services in a way that achieves value for money for the life of the contract. This means that whilst the cost of the contract is important we also look at what else can be gained – for example, apprenticeship opportunities or environmentally friendly working practices.

Principle D:

Determining the interventions necessary to optimize the achievement of the intended outcomes

1. Identifying the right course of action

Decision making reports contain information on the options considered which includes outlining the impact of doing nothing. Financial and legal implications are explained, and the reports contain information on how the work contributes to the One Coventry Plan as well as how risks are managed. The report also includes information on the impact on equalities, including the identification any groups that the decision may have an impact on (including a positive impact) and how any potential adverse impacts on groups will be mitigated. The implications of decisions on climate change, the environment and partners are also outlined in decision making reports.

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) brings together evidence about the health and wellbeing of Coventry residents to help inform the right course of action. This information is used by the Council and health partners to enable us to work together to improve the health and wellbeing of Coventry residents.

There are Procurement Boards and Panels who use the information provided to make informed decisions when we purchase goods and services. This includes considering the Social Value and Sustainability Policy when deciding who to buy our goods and services from.

The One Coventry Policy Forum has been established to provide a collaborative approach, to work to ensure they are complementary. This includes peer challenge and oversight of policies across the council, This helps to ensure we are working as One Coventry to identify the right course of action to collectively achieve our objectives.

2. Planning action

The Council has a One Coventry Plan Performance Management Framework which helps us ensure we achieve what we aim to do. It does so by setting out how we plan and organise our resources to achieve the things we want to do – our vision and priorities, as set out in the One Coventry Plan. By aligning our resources, actions and activities to the Council's vision, priorities and desired outcomes, it helps us measure how public money is turned into results.

3. Maximising outcomes

MTFS (Medium Term Financial Strategy) sets out how we plan to manage our finances for the next three years and how we can closely align resources to the priorities set in the One Coventry Plan. This plan is refreshed annually and considered by Scrutiny, Cabinet and Council.

Principle E:

Developing the Council's capacity including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

1. Developing capacity

The Council has a People Plan which is our workforce strategy. It outlines what we as a Council and a responsible employer are going to do to deliver the workforce vision and objectives, particularly around organisational development and leadership. The People Plan details how we intend to improve capacity, capability and processes to deliver the Council's priorities.

The Council recognises the importance of partnerships in developing capacity in our city. This can be seen through the introduction of a Chief Partnerships Officer at the Council. We are also working with Anchor institutions in the city to grow employment opportunities and retain money in the City by encouraging the purchase of local goods and services. Anchor institutions are large organisations based in the City who have a significant stake in the area – this includes NHS Organisations, Universities and large employers.

2. Developing strong leaders

The Council has a Members Training and Development Strategy which is designed to ensure our Members are properly supported to help them meet the demands of the role. Members need the skills and knowledge to be able to deliver Coventry's ambitions. A well-trained and informed cohort of Elected Members is key to the success of the One Coventry Plan. The strategy provides the framework for Elected Members to access a programme of training that meets their needs, as well as the needs of the organisation to deliver the ambition set out in the One Coventry Plan. The strategy will help to continue to support the development of a training culture for Elected Members.

The Council has Corporate Learning and Development offer in place which includes a strand on leadership and management development. Strengthening the leadership and management capability of our workforce will enable us to address some of the challenges we face as an organisation and will put us in a better position to deliver our 'One Coventry' ambitions through our One Coventry Plan.

Principle F:

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

1. Managing risk

The Risk Management Policy and Strategy sets out the mechanisms for the identification and management of risks in the Council. This includes requirements for both service and directorate registers to be maintained and sets out when risks should be reported to the Strategic Leadership Team to consider if it should be included in the Corporate Risk Register. The Corporate Risk Register contains the most significant risks the Council faces and is kept under review by the Strategic Leadership Team and the Audit and Procurement Committee. In addition, risk registers are maintained for significant projects the Council is working on and all decision-making reports must explain how risks will be managed.

2. Managing performance

Performance against the One Coventry Performance Management Framework is reported to Scrutiny, Cabinet and Council.

Members who are not on the Cabinet assist with managing performance through the scrutiny process. The Council has six scrutiny boards which are responsible for keeping a check on decisions and how they are made. They help to provide transparency and enable decisions and policy to be challenged. Scrutiny plays a part in developing Council policy, reviewing Council Services, and making sure the Council is acting efficiently and efficiently. Scrutiny meetings are open to the public and welcome suggestions and comments from the public on items to scrutinise.

Performance management takes place across the organisation. There are a number of Officer groups at which performance is discussed in different levels of details. This includes the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT), One Coventry Leadership Team (OCLT) and Extended Leadership Team (ELT).

Employees have an annual appraisal which considers their performance, targets and development needs.

Performance management of the Council's subsidiaries is undertaken by Coventry Municipal Holdings Ltd who are accountable to a Shareholder Committee.

3. Robust internal control

Officers are responsible for implementing appropriate systems of internal control to manage risks within their services. The Council's Internal Audit Service are responsible for providing independent assurance that internal control processes are operating effectively and advising on actions to improve systems and processes where necessary. The Internal Audit Charter defines the purpose, authority, responsibility and position of Internal Audit within the Council.

The Council has a Fraud and Corruption Strategy which sets out the Council's arrangements for responding to the risk of fraud and corruption.

The Council has an Audit and Procurement Committee who ensure there is sufficient assurance over governance, risk and internal control and oversee the work of Internal Audit.

4. Managing data

The Council's information governance framework ensures that personal information is held and processed in a confidential and secure manner while ensuring compliance with the relevant statutory and regulatory requirements. Key roles have been identified to ensure appropriate oversight and accountability. A corporate information risk register has been developed for regular review by the Information Management Strategy Group, which is chaired by the Senior Information Risk Officer. Guidelines and training are in place to support the safe collection, storage and use of data and a reporting system is in place to identify data incidents which are investigated and used to identify lessons learned. Information about incidents and near misses are reported annually to the Audit and Procurement Committee.

5. Strong financial management

The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy sets out the financial planning foundations that support the setting of the Council's revenue and capital budgets and the Constitution sets out the budget and policy framework procedure rules, financial procedure rules, and rules for contracts. Budgetary control arrangements are in place including defined responsibilities of budget holders and budget managers. Quarterly financial monitoring reports are presented to Cabinet and Audit and Procurement Committee, along with out-turn reports. An annual assessment is undertaken of both the Council's compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management Code, which provides guidance for effective and sustainable financial management in local authorities and the role of the S151 Officer (The Chief Operating Officer) against the CIPFA Statement of the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government.

Principle G:

Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability

1. Implementing good practice in transparency

The Council complies with the Local Government Transparency Code, which sets out which information we should be publishing and the timeframe for doing so.

Our report templates are standardised and designed to make sure that it is clear why a decision has been taken and that the appropriate information is provided to explain the decision. The reports and minutes of meetings are published and meetings are open to the public.

2. Implementing good practices in reporting

We report our performance through the One Coventry Performance Report. This is available on our website.

We compile our Statement of Accounts on an annual basis. The Statement of Accounts gives residents and other interested parties clear information about the Council's finances and operational and financial performance. The statement summarises; the cost of services provided by us in the year; how services were paid for and our assets and liabilities at the year end. The Statement of Accounts is available on our website. The Council's External Auditors assess the Council's arrangements for providing value for money as part of their audit on the Statement of Accounts.

The Coventry Municipal Holdings Ltd Board provide the Shareholder Committee and Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee with a summary of the activities and financial performance of Coventry Municipal Holdings Ltd Group over the preceding year.

3. Assurance and effective accountability

The Council are subject to a number of external reviews and inspections including OFSTED and CQC, as well as external audit. The outcomes of these inspections and reviews are published. Governance and oversight of these reviews and inspections are undertaken through the local authority. For example, recommendations from the OFSTED review of Children's Services are addressed through the Children's Services Improvement Board.

Services participate in peer reviews which are designed to support the council's performance by identifying its areas of strength and areas for development. A Peer Review is conducted by a team of people with experience and knowledge of the service being reviewed.

Improvement plans are developed and monitored to implement recommendations from reviews and inspections and this is overseen by Cabinet Members in their regular briefings with Directors and by the One Coventry Leadership Team.

The Council has an Audit and Procurement Committee who ensure that there is sufficient assurance over governance, risk and control within the Council. They also monitor the implementation of internal audit and external audit recommendations.

The Council produces an Annual Governance Statement which provides accountability to stakeholders on how well it has delivered on governance over the course of the previous year.

