

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

Annual Governance Statement 2019/20



ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2019/20

SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

West Lindsey District Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper accounting standards, and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively. West Lindsey District 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, West Lindsey District Council has put 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.

During 2019/20, West Lindsey District Council has worked to its code of corporate governance. This follows the principles set out in guidance provided by CIPFA/SOLACE in 2016 within their Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework. The purpose of the Framework is to assist local government to take responsibility for developing and shaping an informed approach to governance, aimed at achieving the highest standards in a measured and proportionate way. A copy of the authority's framework is on the Council's website contained within the [Codes and Protocols](#) section of The Constitution.

This Annual Governance Statement explains how West Lindsey District Council has complied with the code and also meets the requirements of Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, regulations 4(3) and 4(4), which requires all relevant bodies to prepare and publish an annual governance statement.

THE PURPOSE OF THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values by which the authority is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads its communities. It enables the authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate services that represent value for money. The framework has been reviewed during the year and is deemed to be relevant and robust.

The system of internal control is an important 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 on-going process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of West Lindsey District Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the

likelihood and potential impact of those risks being realised and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The governance framework has been in place at West Lindsey District Council for the year ended 31st March 2020 and up to the date of approval of the statement of accounts at a meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee on 29th September 2020.

THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

The Governance Framework is presented in detail at Appendix One with commentary about improvements made during the year and improvements still required. Some of the key features of the Governance Framework are set out below.

The Council's governance arrangements have been tested by the Covid-19 Pandemic. This has caused severe disruption to the manner in which the Council usually progresses its decision making and wider operations. Governance procedures and protocols concerning the holding of Committee meetings, the functioning of internal Programme Boards, performance reporting, information governance, business continuity and emergency planning and consideration of risk, have all been tested with revised arrangements put in place and regular advisory messages relayed to staff.

The Council's Constitution has been used as a basis from which delegations and matters relating to the ability to meet legislative and statutory requirements have been considered. It is pleasing to report that for matters that did not require new legislation e.g the ability to hold virtual meetings, the Constitution provided a robust framework from which revised arrangements were drawn up following delegated decisions.

Throughout the statement, where the Pandemic has impinged on governance related matters, specific reference has been made to the impact and the Council's response is detailed.

Other significant activity during the year which has involved third party scrutiny of governance includes the follow-up audit related to culture and values (this reported a high level of assurance) and also a Peer Review which was held in the first quarter of 2020; the findings of which were extremely positive. Reference is made within the Statement to relevant findings emanating from both of these reports.

In 2018/19 the Council launched its new Corporate Plan covering the period 2019-2023. It sets out the Council's vision for the District and sets out key strategic objectives which will deliver desired outcomes for communities. The Corporate Plan is explicitly aligned to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and Executive Business Plan which details key corporate activity over a three year time frame which will support the achievement of the Council's aims and objectives. This ensures that the aspirations in the Corporate Plan are realistic within the context of the funding constraints placed on the Council. Progress against the priorities detailed within the Corporate Plan is reported annually, as

is the on-going relevance of the Plan which takes into account feedback from surveys conducted with the citizens of West Lindsey.

The Constitution of West Lindsey District Council establishes the roles and responsibilities of the Full Council, Policy Committees, scrutiny and officer functions, with clear delegation arrangements and protocols for effective communication in respect of the authority and partnership arrangements. The Constitution is reviewed annually to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose.

The Constitution also contains rules of procedures (standing orders and financial regulations) that define clearly how decisions are taken and where authority lies for decisions. The statutory roles of Head of the Paid Service, Monitoring Officer and Chief Financial Officer are described, together with their contributions to provide robust assurance on governance and to ensure that expenditure is lawful and in line with approved budgets and procedures. The influence and oversight exerted by these posts is backed by the post-holders' membership of the Council's Management Team.

West Lindsey District Council has developed, communicated and embedded codes of conduct, defining the standards of behaviour for both Members and staff. In addition, training needs are identified through development appraisals and reviews, enabling individuals to undertake their present roles effectively and have the opportunity to develop to meet their own and the Council's current and future needs.

West Lindsey District Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review is informed by:

- 1. The Combined Assurance Report – made up from:**
 - a) Feedback from senior managers within the Authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment and its effectiveness within their areas
 - b) An independent review by the Corporate Governance Team
 - c) The findings of the Annual Audit Work Plan
 - d) Third Party assessment e.g. peer review, external consultancy
- 2. The Annual Review of Comments, Compliments and Complaints**
- 3. The Annual Monitoring Officer Report and Review of The Constitution**
- 4. The Annual Review of the Effectiveness of Internal Audit**
- 5. Reviews of Whistleblowing**
- 6. The Annual Review of Fraud**
- 7. The Head of Internal Audit's Annual Report**
- 8. Comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates**

These reviews have been considered by the Governance and Audit Committee as well as a draft version of this governance statement. As a result the arrangements are deemed as being fit for purpose.

The areas already addressed and those to be specifically addressed via an

action plan to be developed in the coming year are outlined below.

SIGNIFICANT GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Over the last year the Council has consolidated its progress made over previous years in embedding its corporate governance arrangements and procedures and to consistently communicate the message across the organisation that governance is an essential component of corporate activity. However, as major projects have developed and commercial initiatives have been pursued, the Council has been cognisant of the need to ensure governance and decision making processes do not inhibit the successful achievement of desired outcomes. Hence, the Council's attitude to risk and governance have been the subject of much discussion to determine the right balance between probity and the taking of opportunities.

This work has been recognised by the Head of Internal Audit. Taking account of the activity and changes within the Council during 2019/20 and the audit and consultancy work the audit team have undertaken, she has concluded that the Council's internal control environment (comprising of governance; risk; internal control and financial control) is performing adequately. Some improvements have been identified and attention should be paid to reviewing lessons learned from the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The capacity and capability of the Council to deliver its objectives is regularly reviewed. This ensures that staffing requirements are appropriate to support both operational and programme delivery. Where appropriate, expert subject matter advice has been externally sourced to provide expertise and objective thinking in support of a number of the Council's key projects.

We also continue to review and refresh where appropriate, the main processes which constitute the Council's performance and governance framework. This includes considerations relating to project management, partnership arrangements, risk management, procurement and contract management. We aim to provide clear guidance and support and regularly undertake workshops with staff to ensure that procedures are fully understood and are routinely applied. Work has also been undertaken to review the Council's Portfolio Board structure to provide appropriate support and scrutiny in relation to project development and to realise effective delivery.

The Council continues to work closely with a combination of colleagues from Lincolnshire Procurement and Lincolnshire Legal Shared Services to ensure that governance arrangements supporting the Council's growth and commercial agendas are robust. Where appropriate, additional relevant external professional advice is sought to review particular proposals and help steer decision making. Additionally, to expedite efficient decision making, arrangements are in place to hold concurrent policy and resourcing committee meetings, to secure policy/project and resourcing approvals within the same session.

Training for staff and Members has also taken place during 2019/20, as have workshop sessions and regular feedback to Members and the Management Team on governance related matters and a number of other subject areas.

A refresh of measures to be incorporated into the Council's Progress and Delivery reporting has been undertaken to ensure that we report against meaningful aspects of service delivery and also track and record progress against the ambitions detailed within the Council's Corporate Plan.

During 2019/20 West Lindsey District Council has also regularly reviewed progress against the significant issues identified in the previous year's AGS (2018/19). Six-monthly update reports have been presented to the Council's Management Team and the Governance and Audit Committee. Issues that have been sufficiently progressed and so are now removed from the AGS (2018/19) action plan are:

1. **Risk Management** – Assess the Council's overall 'risk appetite' and subsequently undertake a review of Strategic Risks and develop a means of ensuring that project related risks are consistently recorded and managed
2. **Peer Review** - Prepare for and hold a Peer Review to set improvement targets and seek third party accreditation against a nationally recognised framework
3. **Governance Review** - Work on the findings of the Governance Review, undertaken by Internal Audit, to ensure the Council's culture and values are consistently understood and exhibited
4. **Member Induction & Training** - Induct new and returning Councillors and implement the Member Development Training Plan

SIGNIFICANT CURRENT ISSUES TO BE A FOCUS IN 2020/21.


During 2020/21, the Council will pay attention to a number of issues as described below and will continue to stress the message across the organisation that governance is a core component of corporate activity. Hence all officers are required to play a part in ensuring that our processes and systems are robust and adhered to. On-going 'testing' of our processes will be undertaken and we will continue to work in a collaborative manner with colleagues from both Internal and External Audit.


Those issues that have been identified as requiring particular attention during 2020/21 are reproduced below. These were identified by Management Team; via reference to Internal Audit opinion and through the work undertaken to complete the Council's Combined Assurance Report for 2019/20. Progress will be made in 2020/21; monitored by the Management Team and the Governance and Audit Committee.

The significant issues identified are:

1. Implement senior management restructure
2. The production of the Council's Climate and Sustainability Strategy
3. Address issues arising out of effectiveness of Governance & Audit Committee survey
4. Post-pandemic recovery response & plans
5. Review of the effectiveness and understanding of corporate procurement procedures
6. Maintain oversight and assurance on progress of the Peer Review action plan

We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters via an action plan to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps 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. There have been no significant events or developments relating to the governance system between the year-end and the date on which the Statement of Accounts were signed by the responsible financial officer.

Signed:  Date: _____
Councillor Giles McNeill, Leader of the Council on behalf of West Lindsey District Council

Signed:  Date: _____
Ian Knowles, Head of Paid Service on behalf of West Lindsey District Council

APPENDIX 1 - THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

1. The Council's Vision

Objective: Developing, communicating, operationalising and reviewing the Council's vision

This section incorporates information relating to:

- identifying and communicating the Council's vision
- reviewing the Council's vision and its implications for the Council's governance arrangements
- translating the vision into objectives for the Council and its partnerships

To help identify priorities, the Council analyses information from external sources, internal statistics, engagement events, working with partners and horizon scanning reports. It produces an annual State of the District Report for review by Members, the public and other stakeholders alike.

Priorities are tested further through public consultation with both the Citizen's Panel (an established representative group of approximately 1600 local residents) and residents more generally. This is supplemented by engagement with a range of businesses and third sector organisations and Member workshops, which build on the identified community priorities.

In 2019 the Council launched a new Corporate Plan to cover the period 2019-2023. This timeframe complements the period of the current administration following elections in May 2019. The overall vision for the Council is:

“West Lindsey is a great place to be where people, businesses and communities can thrive and reach their potential.”

The Plan, which was approved by Council in March 2019, contains the following strategic priorities within the themes of Our People, Our Place, Our Council:

OUR PEOPLE		
Priorities		
Health & Wellbeing	Vulnerable Groups & Communities	Education & Skills

OUR PLACE		
Priorities		
Economy	Housing Growth	Public Safety & Environment

OUR COUNCIL		
Priorities		
Finances	Customer	Staff & Members

The Corporate Plan is explicitly linked to the MTFP through to 2024 and the Council’s annual Executive Business Plan.

The Council works hard to ensure that the concept of the ‘Golden Thread’ is evidenced; meaning that all staff can identify their service area’s and own individual contributions to the achievement of the Corporate Plan’s strategic outcomes. The identification of, and reporting on, relevant service level activity that contributes to the achievement of outcomes strengthens this. The findings of the Peer Review conducted at the Council during the year commented that:

“The Council brings together many of these sources to produce its annual State of the District report, which provides a focused yet comprehensive understanding and picture of the district. All this information enables the council to decide its corporate and service-level aspirations, priorities, strategies and plans in a robust, informed and intelligent way.

And ...There are clear linkages between the Council’s priorities, strategies and plans, which are also highlighted within and between the Council’s key wider partnership plans, eg the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership Strategic Economic Plan and the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan. These linkages at both council and partnership level clarify who is doing what, in which area, and why. These linkages also evidence the council’s understanding and influence within the area, ensuring that West Lindsey district plays its fullest part within the wider Lincolnshire area, eg in terms of economic growth and housing.”

The Council publishes its [Corporate Plan](#) on its website in accordance with requirements for transparency and making information available for local people. Reviews of progress against its objectives are carried out annually and presented at Full Council to Members for review and endorsement. An annual summary publication detailing progress is also produced and shared with stakeholders and published on the Council’s website.

The Corporate Plan is delivered in the main through the Council's Portfolio Board. It has a clear terms of reference outlining responsibilities for delivery and the board's delivery plan is further translated into business and service plans, team plans and personal actions (through the appraisal process), which contain specific key objectives, desired outcomes, responsibilities and targets. This ensures that the necessary resources, both staff and financial, are allocated to deliver the service plans and informs the MTFP and annual Executive Business Plan.

The financial management of the Council is organised through robust processes and procedures which deliver strong financial control arrangements which are supported by comprehensive Financial Regulations. Overall financial management activities regularly receive high assurance ratings from Internal Auditors.

Budget and performance monitoring is undertaken monthly with quarterly reporting to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee. These reports capture forecast variances at out turn and identify any areas where performance is under or over achieving. Where overspends are forecast, actions are taken to reduce the forecast, where possible. To mitigate pressures on commercial income the Council has a £200k contingency budget which offsets any impacts of reductions in demand or non-payment.

The Council holds budget consultation events to inform residents, communities and businesses on how it intends to allocate resources and support investment projects in future years and also to obtain feedback on emerging priorities and Council Tax increases.

The Annual Budget, Financial Strategy, Executive Business Plan and Medium Term Financial Plan are approved by Council at its meeting in March, as are the Council's Treasury Management and Capital Investment Strategies. Budget scrutiny is provided by the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee and in respect of Treasury Management, the Governance and Audit Committee. The Medium Term Financial Plan is subject to a mid-year review and is presented to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee

To ensure that staff possess the necessary financial knowledge and skills and are supported in financial management matters, Finance Business Partners play a key role. By working closely with Team Managers they ensure that budgets are closely monitored and that any business cases for new projects are critically appraised. The Portfolio Board monitors programmes of project work which deliver corporate plan objectives.

Staff are supported in understanding their financial management responsibilities through a number of mediums; e-learning, training events/workshops and one to one support.

The Council continues to meet the financial challenges it faces and has received a high assurance rating from a recent audit of its financial resilience and sustainability.

However, there a number of financial uncertainties ahead. The review of local government financing will see a Fairer Funding Review, Business Rates Retention to 75% (from 50%) Scheme, a Business Rates reset and the amount of overall funding available for Local Government. We have taken a prudent approach in estimating the impact this will have on the Council and have increased our General Fund Working Balance to ensure a balanced budget whilst our investment programmes deliver efficiencies.

In addition we are expecting to see a significant impact on our income streams as the recent Covid-19 Pandemic initiatives taken by the government have included the closure of all retail, hospitality and leisure facilities, in addition to additional costs to support our economy and communities. Whilst government have issued grant funding support, we will be monitoring the impact of our finances closely over the next few months and will be reporting to Members with a revised budget alongside a mid-year review of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

2. Measuring the Quality of Services

Objective: Measuring the quality of services for users, ensuring they are delivered in accordance with the authority's objectives and ensuring that they represent the best use of resources and value for money

Performance Management and Value for Money

During 2019/20, the Council has monitored the effectiveness of the Progress and Delivery report in monitoring and reporting on performance. Quarterly reports are provided for both policy committees with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee retaining oversight. A sub-group of this Committee has met once again to discuss the need for a refresh of measures for 2020/21 and to review the periodicity of reporting to ensure that progress against the achievement of corporate priorities can be adequately tracked. This has led to a decision that from 2020/21 the Committee will receive six-monthly reports rather than quarterly. We are keen to stress the message that any measures adopted should be able to help the Council learn and improve. The Head of Paid Service is responsible for performance management and provides:

1. Quarterly Progress and Delivery reports to the policy committees and the scrutiny committee
2. Assurance that the reports provide quality and contextual data for Members

The Peer Review highlighted a known weakness in performance reporting in that it is not automated and therefore requires significant resource to produce and analyse reports. This could be better used in using performance information to actively consider what is and is not working, why, and deciding who needs to take what action, and when, to improve outcomes. The Review found that generally most teams are recognised as high-performers as a result of their successful approaches to performance management but there are inconsistencies between services. Some opportunities are therefore being lost to deploy resources and staff to best effect to deliver the Council's priorities.

Individual performance is discussed via one to ones and the appraisal system for employees, which continues to be monitored to ensure that it is applied consistently.

The Council has adhered to the transparency agenda by publishing spend over £250 on the Council's web site on a monthly basis and continues to meet the legal requirements to publish equality objectives.

Commissioning Partnerships

To achieve value for money and the best use of resources, the Council has adopted a positive approach to partnership working and has retained a number of shared working arrangements, mainly with North Kesteven District Council (NKDC). Other key partnerships include the Lincolnshire Waste Partnership; Lincolnshire Legal Shared Services; Procurement Lincolnshire; the creation of a formal statutory body to consider planning policy across Central Lincolnshire, the West Lindsey Employment & Skills Partnership and the Wellbeing Service provided in partnership with a number of neighbouring District Councils and Lincolnshire County Council. Additionally, key contractual partnerships incorporating performance management aspects are in place for a range of services such as leisure provision.

The Council's ambitious growth plans for the District are beginning to crystallise with the formation of a key strategic outcome focused partnership (in the form of a joint venture) established to achieve regeneration in the retail sector in Gainsborough. Additional work has secured a further development partner to focus on delivering comprehensive regeneration of Gainsborough town centre. Both arrangements conspire to ensure that the Council can deliver the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan housing growth target. Further, the Council continues to be engaged in a meaningful manner with partners from the business sector to promote West Lindsey in general and Gainsborough specifically. These partnerships are key to jointly addressing issues such as skills and ultimately promote the District as a place to invest in and grow.

Further examples of partnership working are provided by the work the Council has conducted with the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (GLLEP) and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). As the Council moves its growth plans into delivery, this has attracted significant support and funding from these bodies, providing revenue funds to continue the intensive planning and development work to support land assembly and provide significant capital for site acquisition, infrastructure and in effect, provide gap funding to bridge viability gaps.

To ensure that the Council considers the appropriateness of partnership working prior to entering into arrangements, an Approved Code of Practice (ACoP) is in place to offer guidance and workshops have been held with staff to discuss the topic. As stressed above, it is essential that officers involved in partnership working consider value for money by assessing the on-going importance of any partnership and its effectiveness in meeting intended outcomes.

Value for Money

Specific reference has been made to our approach to achieving value for money in both the Council's Corporate Plan and also the MTFP. Additionally, our approach received a positive outcome when audited by External Audit.

One of the main objectives of the Council is to deliver excellent, value for money services. To assist in achieving this goal, the Council has produced a Value for Money Strategy and action plan. This was approved by the Corporate Policy & Resources Committee in January 2019 and has been shared with External Audit. To support our work in this regard the Council subscribes to a database of metrics which provide the ability to benchmark service related costs and performance, triangulated where possible with outcomes. We continue to assess the usefulness of this resource to achieve best effect and produce value for money assessments across a range of services. These assessments provide services with the basis for achieving greater value for money via improvement plans.

Procurement & Contract Management

Effective procurement and contract management is key to ensuring that value for money is achieved. When last audited, our procurement processes received a substantial assurance rating. However, during 2019/20 issues have arisen in connection with a number of key procurements leading to delays in procuring key items and services. Therefore, work is required to understand more fully the causes and to identify actions required to address matters. The Council's Contract and Procedure Rules and ACoP are regularly reviewed to ensure they keep in line with changes in legislation. Working closely with Procurement Lincs, the Council has worked with service areas to ensure best value is achieved from procurement and contract renewal exercises. Over the last 18 months, savings of approximately £130k have been achieved on like-for-like contract renewals.

Service Reviews

Reviews of service provision, structural arrangements and performance are key components in assessing the value for money of service delivery. During 2019/20 reviews of a number of service areas have been conducted to establish the effectiveness of the way in which work is processed and to identify and implement any potential improvements. For example work has been undertaken in Operational Services to review work flows and remove any inefficiencies.

Customer Feedback

The Council recognises the important role that customer feedback plays in assessing the quality and range of the services delivered. Public consultation plays an integral role in informing budget proposals. Customer satisfaction is a key component of the Council's performance measurement metrics and an annual review of compliments, complaints and comments is reported to Management Team, wider management and Members via a report to the Governance & Audit and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The report details the type and volumes of complaints, provides comparative analysis with previous years and contextual information. To support improvements and consistency in approach, the Council has appointed a Customer Experience Officer to work closely with service areas.

In addition, a pro-active stance is taken across a number of services in the form of customer satisfaction surveys. The consistent application of this across the Council is a key aim in support of effective performance management.

3. Roles, Responsibilities and Delegations

Objective: Defining and documenting the roles and responsibilities of the Full Council, Policy Committees, scrutiny and officer functions, with clear delegation arrangements and protocols for effective communication in respect of the authority and partnerships arrangements

As a 'fourth option council' the Council is not legally required to have a scrutiny function. However, in the interests of good governance The Council does have an overview and scrutiny function in the form of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (formally Challenge & Improvement Committee) and there is a clear split between policy and scrutiny. The function of overview and scrutiny contributes to the decision making process. However, the Peer Review reported mixed views and questions about the function generally, including its effectiveness and purpose and recommended a further review (to the one conducted 18 months previously) to identify the function's value and how it can be most effective; in particular how it can engage all Members constructively.

The Council's policy and decision-making process is defined in detail in The Constitution but can be summarised as follows:

- a) The Budget and Policy Framework is decided by Council and has significant links to the Corporate Plan
- b) The Corporate Policy and Resources Committee formulates policy, plans and strategies which do not form part of the Council's Policy Framework. They are responsible for the effective use of all council resources, whether land finances, property or personnel
- c) The Prosperous Communities Committee deals with economic development, leisure and cultural, environmental and community issues. They formulate policy, plans and strategies other than those identified for adoption by the Council or the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee
- d) Arrangements for concurrent meetings of the Prosperous Communities and Corporate Policy & Resources Committees to consider policy and funding decisions during the same session
- e) The scrutiny function is provided by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee which examines the activity of the policy committees to ensure they deliver Council policy and can call the policy committees to account for aspects of poor/deteriorating performance in areas under their jurisdiction
- f) The Overview & Scrutiny Committee works to an individual work programme of matters to be considered for the year ahead and there is a monitoring role for the Committee to ensure delivery of the programme. Additionally the Committee invites and raises questions and discussion with strategic partners responsible for service delivery across the District
- g) The Overview & Scrutiny Committee can also establish time limited groups to carry out in depth reviews
- h) Quasi-judicial matters such as Planning and Licensing are dealt with through separate Planning and Licensing Committees

The scheme of delegated and reserved powers is set out within The Constitution, including a formal schedule of those matters specifically reserved for collective decision of the Council, taking account of relevant legislation.

The robustness of The Constitution has been tested due to the Covid-19 situation, in particular the need to operate on delegated powers in the absence initially of formal committee meetings and then moving to arrangements to hold virtual meetings. All in all The Constitution has stood up to this test extremely well without the need for any changes, as it allows for such situations and gives the appropriate delegations to the Head of Paid Service in consultation with key elected members. This is in accordance with paragraph 4 of the Head of Paid Service duties which are contained in part IV of the Constitution. To keep Members abreast of the interim arrangements, a flow chart was produced giving details of the process of decision making during the emergency situation.

The Annual Council meeting each year considers a report from the Monitoring Officer which reviews The Constitution to ensure it remains robust and effective. This allows for appropriate amendments to be made.

There are protocols for effective communication which include:

- a) Member/Officer Relations Protocol
- b) Leaders Panel regularly meet with designated officers and Chief Officers
- c) Group Leaders meetings with Key Officers
- d) Briefings for Committee Chairs
- e) Six-weekly Members information bulletin
- f) 'Call-in' protocol which enables a decision of the Policy Committees to be questioned by Overview and Scrutiny before it is finally approved

The Management Team and Leader of the Council have established a communication process and they have mechanisms in place to set and manage the delivery of objectives.

4. Standards of Behaviour

Objective: Developing, communicating and embedding codes of conduct, defining the standards of behavior for Members and staff

It is vital that there is a constructive working relationship between elected Members and Officers and that the respective roles are carried out to a high standard. The Council's leadership is responsible for setting the tone for the organisation and it is tasked with creating a climate of openness, support and respect. To support the Council's new Corporate Plan, work was undertaken in 2018/19 to review the values which both Officers and Members are expected to uphold. The values (set out below) provide the ethical base to drive our business and deliver our vision.

- a) To put the customer at the centre of everything we do
- b) To act as One Council
- c) To be business smart, act on evidence and take advantage of opportunities, thinking creatively and getting things done

- d) To communicate effectively with all stakeholders
- e) To have integrity in everything we do

Lead Member positions also have clear role descriptions set out within The Constitution and these make reference to the behaviours expected when undertaking their duties.

Internal Audit conducted a review of the culture and values of the Council during 2018/19. It was designed to ascertain the extent to which the Council has a culture that places the public and integrity at the heart of its business. Participants were drawn from both Officers and Members. The findings reported that a good culture and ethical framework is working for the Council and its key partners and provided a number of recommendations to help sustain a culture of integrity and to enhance and embed good governance across the Council. During the last year a follow-up audit was conducted. This found that further progress had been made in embedding certain practices which support the Council's culture and ethical framework and a high assurance rating was provided.

Standards of conduct and personal behaviour expected of Members and staff, of work between Members and staff and between the Council, its partners and the community are defined and communicated through codes of conduct and protocols. These are reviewed on a regular basis and when circumstances dictate. For instance during 2017/18, the subject of Member/Officer working protocols was re-visited, with workshops between both parties taking place. These sessions helped to revisit and update the Operational Conventions Protocol within the Council's Constitution. Additionally, officers received training on working in a political environment. This included:

- a. Members and Co-opted Members Code of Conduct
- b. Guidance when dealing with Planning Matters
- c. Protocol on Member/Officer Relations (Operational Conventions protocol)
- d. Officer Code of Conduct
- e. Whistleblowing Policy
- f. Complaints Procedure
- g. Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy
- h. Local Code of Corporate Governance

The Council has in place a Member related Code of Conduct and a Local Code of Corporate Governance. An agreed process is in place to deal with standards matters should they arise. The Standards Sub-Committee plays a significant role in promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct between elected and co-opted Members and hearing complaints where standards of behaviour fall short of what is expected. In particular the role of the Committee is:

- a) promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by councillors and co-opted Members
- b) assisting the councillors and co-opted Members to observe the Members' Code of Conduct
- c) advising the Council on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct

- d) monitoring the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct
- e) advising, training or arranging to train councillors and co-opted Members on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct
- f) granting dispensations to councillors and co-opted Members from requirements relating to interests set out in the Members' Code of Conduct
- g) to hear complaints locally regarding alleged breaches of the Code
- h) exercising such other functions as the Council considers appropriate; and
- i) the exercise of (a) to (g) above in relation to the town/parish councils/meetings and their Members in the Council's area

The Monitoring Officer reported to the Committee in 2019/20 on the number and types of complaints received in the previous 12 months.

The Council works to a recently revised Code of Conduct which now incorporates aspects such as bullying, confidentiality and respect. The new Code has been adopted by a significant number of Parish and Town Councils across the district. The remainder have opted to continue with the code provided by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC).

Over the last year, the Council has participated in a consultation exercise led by The Local Government Association on a revised Model Member Code of Conduct. This is in draft format and when reviewed, it was established that the vast majority of proposals (barring those requiring legislative change) were already included within the Council's current code. On receipt of a final version of the new Model Member Code of Conduct, the Council will act to ensure its own procedures are fully aligned.

The Code of Conduct and the Standards regime form part of the Members' induction arrangements and all Members (new and returning) are required to sign the Code of Conduct and provide a new register of interest return.

There is a Code of Conduct for employees and there is also an induction process in place which includes conduct matters. There is an appraisal process in place for Officers which allows a personal development plan to be put in place.

The Council has an [Anti-fraud and anti-corruption policy](#) and also a [whistleblowing policy](#) in place. Reports on fraud and whistleblowing incidents are presented to Members and are made available for review via the Council's web site.

There are registers of gifts and hospitality, interests, and secondary employment. During the year (and especially around Christmas and holiday periods) Members and staff are reminded of the procedure for registering gifts and hospitality and more senior staff are regularly reminded of the need to do this. Procedures for dealing with conflicts of interest are in place. Arrangements are in place to ensure that Members and employees of the Council are not influenced by prejudice, bias or conflicts of interest in dealing with different stakeholders. The follow-up culture and values audit re-examined these arrangements and found that they were effective and adhered to.

Rules and procedures are set out in The Constitution including Members' Code of Conduct, Operation of the Standards Sub-Committee, Procedure Rules for Committees, Financial and Contract and Procurement Procedure Rules (updated during 2018/19) and Scheme of Delegation.

The Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer also have clear supporting roles.

Awareness of probity issues amongst managers is raised through regular reminders that are sent out to all staff.

The Council has an investigation and disciplinary process for conduct issues and action is taken against employees where conduct falls below that which is expected. At a Chief Officer level this function is undertaken by elected Members and there are clear rules of procedure defined within The Constitution.

5. The Decision Making Framework

Objective: Reviewing the effectiveness of the authority's decision-making framework, including delegation arrangements, decision making in partnerships and robustness of data quality

The scheme of delegated and reserved powers is set out within The Constitution, including a formal schedule of those matters specifically reserved for collective decision of the Council, taking account of relevant legislation. Attention is paid to ensure that arrangements reflect current structures and roles and support appropriate good decision making. As detailed above, a series of delegated powers have been enacted to allow the progress of Council business during the Covid-19 situation.

A Scrutiny Committee (Overview & Scrutiny) is in place and has clear terms of reference. Their operation is covered in The Constitution which allows them to exercise their powers to 'Call In' decisions made by the policy committees and if necessary ask them to reconsider their earlier decisions. During 2017/18, Members received training on the Effectiveness of Scrutiny and undertook an exercise in self-evaluation. During 2018/19, a review of the on-going requirement for this Committee was undertaken, with progress monitored via the 2017/18 AGS action plan. The review recommended that the name of the Committee be changed from Challenge & Improvement to Overview & Scrutiny, its meeting dates should be more flexible so as to ensure a more effective work plan and there ought to be a change in the criteria for membership of the Committee. In January 2019 the Governance & Audit Committee approved the recommendations and the Constitution has been updated to reflect the changes. However, as the Peer Review indicated, further work is required to make this Committee and its purpose fully justified and its operations more effective.

To support joined-up and efficient decision making, particularly in respect of time critical decisions, where appropriate, the Council has implemented concurrent meetings of the Prosperous Communities and the Corporate Policy & Resources Committees within one session. This entails the policy position being debated with recommendations made for resourcing decisions to be determined immediately afterwards. This has worked well to date, to support the expedient progress of key growth and commercial initiatives.

Work has also been completed to ensure that the focus of Committee reports is placed on key decision making. Hence the Council has reduced the number of

reports placed before Members by no longer using Committees for the provision of update and information only reports. Alternative arrangements operate to oversee such matters.

The Council has a robust reporting process in place. There is a committee timetable and Democratic Services identify agendas with the services. The committee report template requires report authors to seek professional comment on financial, human resources, data protection and legal matters. It also prompts officers, where appropriate, to detail at least three options for consideration with a recommended option highlighted and to also consider matters pertaining to risk and equalities.

To help the Council to raise the profile of the climate and environment agenda and as it commences work on its commitment to reduce the impact of its activities to net-zero carbon by 2050, a range of work is required so that relevant decisions fully detail the related climate related aspects and that they are understood.

The meetings of the Council have appropriate agendas, reports and minutes which demonstrate data quality. All Committees are web cast with the Planning Committee and Full Council meetings webcast live. Additional arrangements have been put in place to ensure continuity of the provision, while adhering to relevant guidance and legislation, during the period of the pandemic crisis.

The Council uses training, workshops, ACoPs and manuals to help staff operate systems.

The Council has a Risk Management Strategy (revised during 2019/20) which sets clear policy and guidance on managing risk and Members receive risk management training.

The Council's Portfolio Board oversees the key programmes which have been instigated to support delivery of the Corporate Plan. The most recent audit of the workings of the Portfolio Board provided a substantial assurance rating. Below this Board a number of themed programme boards exist which manage the delivery of individual projects. Each board has specific terms of reference and is chaired by the relevant programme sponsor. A key component to assist in decision making and delivery is the role of sponsor. The role is accountable for putting in place the appropriate governance arrangements (including the formation of a board if necessary) to avoid the creation of a transactional approach and to ensure that due proportionality is applied to risk. The sponsor is also responsible for reporting progress/issues back to the Portfolio Board.

The step change we are making on the growth and commercial agendas (specifically the Commercial Investment Portfolio) requires pace, ability to take a commercial view and responsive governance. Progress has been maintained during 2019/20 to ensure these notions are addressed. The joint sessions of the Prosperous Communities and Corporate Policy & Resources Committees represent examples in this regard. Culturally, much progress has been made with staff and Members to ensure that the key foci in discussions remain on programme direction and the commercial imperatives and opportunities.

Data quality contributes to the achievement of and underpins the Council's priorities. The Council is committed to high standards of data quality and must take care to ensure that the data and information used throughout the organisation and particularly in relation to performance management is fit for purpose. In the recent past, the Council recognised the need to ensure a consistent approach to data quality and has therefore produced and communicated via workshops and meetings a [Data Quality Policy](#). In addition, agreement has been reached with Internal Audit for them to explicitly assess and reference data quality (where relevant) as part of their audit work.

6. Risk Management

Objective: Reviewing the effectiveness of the framework for identifying and managing risks and demonstrating clear accountability

The Council revised its [Risk Management Strategy](#) during 2019/20 which now covers the period 2019-2023. There is also an accompanying risk management ACoP, which supports the strategy to outline operational procedures and roles and responsibilities.

The most recent Internal Audit review of the Council's risk management arrangements provided a substantial assurance finding. Service risk management is a standing item of the Service Leadership Team (SLT) meeting agenda whereby any issues can be raised and service areas undertake on-going assessment of service related risks. They are supported in doing this by governance colleagues. A number of workshops with staff and Management Team have been held during the year to discuss risk and the Council has attended Lincolnshire Risk Management Group meetings.

All risks are maintained on a central system which enables risk owners to record risks at both service and strategic levels. If any service risk escalates in nature there is a process in place by which it can be brought to the attention of Management Team.

Following the production of the Council's new Corporate Plan, work has been completed to review the Council's strategic risks so as to ensure that the risks to the achievement of its strategic objectives are identified and understood. This aligns the Council's approach to the consideration of strategic risks to that advocated by the Association of Local Authority Risk Managers (ALARM). Strategic risks are owned and reviewed regularly by Management Team and are presented for scrutiny by the Governance and Audit Committee on a six-monthly basis. This Committee has a responsibility as part of their terms of reference for approving the Risk Strategy and maintain an overview of risks. The committee has also appointed a Risk Champion who has clear terms of reference.

7. Counter-Fraud and Anti-Corruption

Objective: Ensuring effective counter-fraud and anti-corruption arrangements are developed and maintained

The Council has an [Anti-Fraud, Corruption and Money Laundering Strategy](#)

which stresses a zero tolerance approach and is part of a suite of policies covering:

- Whistleblowing Policy
- Disciplinary Policy
- Covert Surveillance Policy
- Codes of Conduct for Members and Officers
- Risk Management Policy and Strategy
- Gifts and Hospitality
- Standing Orders

The policy applies to:

- All West Lindsey District Council Employees.
- Councillors and Independent Members
- Staff and members of Council funded voluntary organisations
- Partners
- Suppliers, contractors and consultants
- Residents

Members of staff, partners and contractors have all been reminded of the policy and how to raise any concerns, or report suspected fraud or corruption, through a series of leaflets and posters and a 'Fighting Fraud' leaflet is distributed annually to all staff. An anti-fraud presentation forms part of the corporate induction process. The Council also maintains a specific fraud related risk register.

The Governance and Audit Committee receive a yearly report on anti-fraud and corruption arrangements and the action that has been taken to investigate and prosecute cases. No instances were reported during 2019/20.

To monitor and manage the risk of fraud, the Council is a member of the Lincolnshire Fraud Partnership. The Council also takes part in the Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) work and the National Fraud Initiative (NFI); a bi-annual exercise that matches electronic data within and between public sector bodies to prevent and detect fraud.

All matters relating to the Council's approach for communicating to staff the seriousness by which it takes this subject matter and the processes it has in place to prevent, detect and act where malpractice occurs, formed part of the follow-up culture and ethics audit. All arrangements were reviewed favourably.

8. Management of Change

Objective: Ensuring effective management of change and transformation

Governance arrangements are in place to ensure change is effectively managed in the form of Board scrutiny, effective project management and Progress and Delivery reporting against projects and programme development. Members are also part of this process and regular reports are produced to keep them updated.

To support change, the Council works to an agreed project management methodology. Assistance for staff and adherence to the methodology is

overseen by a Senior Programme Officer. Processes are working well as exemplified by an audit conducted during the year which reviewed Programme and Project Management arrangements. It concluded that effective processes are in place and provided a rating of substantial assurance.

Boards are assigned a Programme Sponsor responsible for delivery. In this regard their remit is to direct and provide support to project managers and also ensure a high quality of project development and adherence to the Council's project management methodology. Effective communication is regarded as crucial to delivering change. Strong links have been forged between the relevant Boards and the Communications Team to ensure developments are relayed across the Council and further afield.

To support colleagues involved in change initiatives, a high level change management strategy has been implemented and a number of key staff have undertaken specific training in the subject matter. It is important that colleagues are coached and supported through any change programme. To provide strategic capacity and capability concerned with change and transformation, particularly in support of the delivery of key programmes and projects, the Council continues with an approach of sourcing professional subject related expertise on a needs basis. This is intended to deliver better value for money and provide objectivity.

9. Role of the Chief Financial Officer

Objective: Ensuring the authority's financial management arrangements conform with the governance requirements of the [CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government \(2010\)](#) and, where they do not, explain why and how they deliver the same impact

Following the retirement of two of the three Executive Directors during 2019/20, the former Executive Director of Resources was appointed Head of Paid Service and currently retains the role of Chief Financial Officer under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972. Pending the implementation of a senior management restructure, this remains the position. However, the re-structure will address this and also address a point raised by the Peer Review that recommended separating these roles to reduce any potential conflicts of interest and associated risks.

This officer has statutory responsibility for the proper planning, administration and monitoring of the Council's financial affairs. The Council's financial management arrangements also conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010).

The financial management of the Council is conducted in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules set out in The Constitution. The financial management system includes:

- A five year MTFP which is reviewed and updated annually to support

the delivery of the Council's strategic priorities.

- An annual budget cycle incorporating Council approval for revenue and capital budgets as well as treasury management strategies.
- Financial Procedure Rules that are reviewed at intervals of not more than three years. Relevant amendments are made when required.
- Process and procedure guidance manuals.
- Regular budget monitoring by budget holders through monthly financial monitoring meetings and reports.
- Four reports per year to Management Team and Members relating to the Council's financial position stating financial and performance information.
- Annual accounts supporting stewardship responsibilities which are subjected to external audit and which follow the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK in line with International Financial Reporting Standards.

10. Role of the Head of Internal Audit

Objective: Ensuring the authority's assurance arrangements conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit (2010) and, where they do not, explain why and how they deliver the same impact

The [CIPFA statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit \(2010\)](#) states that the Head of Internal Audit in a public service organisation plays a critical role in delivering the organisation's strategic objectives by:

1. Championing best practice in governance, objectively assessing the adequacy of governance and management of existing risks, commenting on responses to emerging risks and proposed developments
2. Giving an objective and evidence based opinion on all aspects of governance, risk management and internal control

To perform this role the Head of Internal Audit:

3. Must be a senior manager with regular and open engagement across the organisation, particularly with the Management Team and with the Audit Committee
4. Must lead and direct an internal audit service that is resourced to be fit for purpose; and
5. Must be professionally qualified and suitably experienced

A review of the CIPFA statement has taken place and no matters of concern were identified. The Head of Internal Audit reports to the Management Team and the Governance & Audit Committee on a regular basis in relation to audit and governance related matters.

The Council has in place an Internal Audit Charter which defines the terms of

reference for Internal Audit by setting out the nature, role, responsibilities and authority of the Internal Audit service within the Council.

The Constitution identifies that the Chief Finance Officer is responsible for providing an efficient and effective Internal Audit service, which will comply with relevant legislation and best auditing practice. The Council reports annually on the effectiveness of the service it receives from Internal Audit.

11. Role of the Monitoring Officer

Objective: Ensuring effective arrangements are in place for the discharge of the monitoring officer function

The [Constitution](#) covers the key statutory role and functions of the Monitoring Officer. It also includes the requirement for the Council to ensure that the Monitoring Officer has access to sufficient skills and resources to undertake the role. The Monitoring Officer has confirmed that this is the case and he continues to review this. Appropriate training is delivered where needs are identified and the Officer has attended a number of training courses during 2019/20.

There is a specific job role which reflects the Monitoring Officer duties. The Monitoring Officer is line-managed by the Head of Paid Service. No conflict of interest in this line management structure has been identified.

12. Role of the Head of Paid Service

Objective: Ensuring effective arrangements are in place for the discharge of the Head of Paid Service function

The statutory provisions are included in The [Constitution](#). As a result of the retirement of two of the Executive Directors during 2019/20, the Council has reverted to a Chief Executive led model who also fulfils the role of the Head of Paid Service.

The Leader and the Chief Executive have agreed corporate objectives and key priorities for the year. Monitoring against progress is achieved via regular liaison between the relevant parties.

13. The Audit Committee

Objective: Undertaking the core functions of an audit committee, as identified in CIPFA's Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities

The Council maintains and operates a Governance & Audit Committee which is independent of the Policy Committees and the scrutiny function. Membership includes up to three Independent Members and the Committee is currently quorate in this regard. The Committee receives training and has a defined work plan. Substitutes are not permitted unless the substitute has undertaken specific audit committee training.

The core functions of the [Governance and Audit Committee](#) are set out in The

Constitution. Its terms of reference are in line with CIPFA guidance and the Committee operates to these.

Some Governance & Audit Committee members are also members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. This arrangement has been agreed by Full Council.

During 2019/20, the Committee has reviewed CIPFA's most recent guidance (Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police – 2018). As a result a self-evaluation review of its effectiveness has been undertaken by members of the Committee; the results of which are being analysed and will be used to identify any aspects that require attention. Furthermore, the Chair of the Committee has prepared a report for Council on its work during 2019/20. This is the first report of this kind in recent years and will be presented to Full Council once this forum reconvenes.

14. Compliance with Laws and Regulations

Objective: Ensuring compliance with relevant laws and regulations, internal policies and procedures, and that expenditure is lawful

The Constitution and relevant job descriptions outline Officer, Member, Committee and Council responsibilities. The Council's statutory officers are the Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive), the Section 151 Officer (Chief Executive) and the Monitoring Officer (Acting Director of Governance). These officers are responsible for ensuring that the Council acts within the law and in accordance with established policies and procedures. Counsel opinion may be obtained in certain circumstances and unusual transactions are referred to the External Auditor for consideration.

The Section 151 Officer is specifically responsible for the proper discharge of the Council's financial arrangements and must advise elected Members where expenditure is likely to exceed resources. Where any proposal is unlawful, the Section 151 Officer, jointly with the Monitoring Officer, have a duty (should such a scenario arise) to produce a 'Section Five' report and inform the Head of Paid Service and External Audit.

The Management Team carry responsibility for ensuring that legislation and policy relating to service delivery and health and safety are implemented. A disciplinary process is in place for both staff and Members for any breaches.

The subject of compliance with legislation (including Health and Safety matters) is detailed within the Council's strategic risk register. This demonstrates the importance the Council places on the requirement to comply with and/or correctly implement relevant statutory legislation.

To ensure legal advice is available to the Council, it is part of the Lincolnshire Legal Shared Services Partnership. They hold a central library of all relevant legislation and are consulted when required. In certain cases, expert or specialised legal advice is also obtained from other sources. Departments take responsibility for receiving and operating to new legislative responsibilities as they arise, with service and business planning providing opportunities to consider the implications and plan for legislative change.

Legislation and Statutory Instruments are dealt with and assessed as they are received (from a range of sources including national email alert systems). Changes in legislation have been implemented successfully with no major issues arising.

The communication of local policies and procedures is embedded in a number of different ways such as SLT meetings and workshops, team briefings and local training. Officers ensure that they are aware of and comply with laws and regulations which are relevant to their roles. During 2019/20 refresher training on the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) was again provided for relevant staff.

The Council pays close attention to requirements relating to Information Governance and close working arrangements are in place with neighbouring authorities. Training packages have been provided for staff during the year via the Council's on-line training platform. A work plan is in place to 'test' on-going compliance and assess the robustness of the Council's information governance arrangements. Best practice has been followed with the nomination of officers to the roles of Senior Information Risk Officer (SIRO) and Senior Information Governance Officer (SIGO) and Data Protection Officer (DPO). The Corporate Information Governance Group meets regularly to review information governance related matters and developments.

The Governance and Audit Committee receive reports by Internal Audit which include review of compliance with legislation. This provides the Committee with an overview of compliance with policy and procedures and it can request attendance of managers to provide further assurance.

15. Whistleblowing Arrangements

Objective: Arrangements for whistleblowing and for receiving and investigating complaints from the public

The Council has in place a [Whistleblowing Policy](#) which was refreshed during 2019/20. It is available for reference via the Council's web site and internal intranet and its existence and content is regularly communicated to staff. The Council also works in partnership with Lincolnshire County Council and fellow Lincolnshire authorities to develop and produce a county-wide 'Fighting Fraud' leaflet which is distributed to staff. Reports are presented to the Governance & Audit Committee on whistleblowing and more general customer feedback. A review of these arrangements formed part of the culture and values follow-up audit and they were deemed to be operating effectively.

The Council also has in place a customer complaints, compliments and comments procedure. The [procedure](#) is available for view on the intranet and web site. When complaints are received an internal independent officer (Customer Experience Officer) is appointed to investigate and in certain circumstances an external appointment may be made. One of the key aspects of the policy is our desire to learn from complaints to rectify matters if required. Where appropriate, complaints that have been referred to the Ombudsman are brought to the attention of the Management Team.

16. Member and Officer Development

Objective: Identifying the development needs of Members and senior officers in relation to their strategic roles, supported by appropriate training

A Member Development Plan is in place, having been put into operation as part of the induction and on-going training arrangements for new and returning Members following elections in 2019. The plan will oversee the training and development requirements of the current administration and is complied with the Governance & Audit Committee providing input and feedback. The contents of the plan are compiled from a number of sources:

- Requirements from The Constitution
- Areas for development recommended for each committee
- Feedback from Members
- Areas of interest
- Changes to the local government environment including legislation

Member training is also recorded to keep track of the training delivered, details of Member attendance and feedback on the quality and usefulness of the training. During the year, Members have received training on such matters as Treasury Management Strategy Scrutiny; Statement of Accounts Scrutiny; Code of Conduct, Data Protection, Licensing and Development Management related topics. Satisfaction levels among Members with the training provided remains extremely high and attendance rates at training events has increased during 2019/20.

Initial steps were taken during the last year to provide training to Members via an on-line platform. A pilot project has been run and evaluated by the Governance & Audit Committee. Arrangements are now in place to roll this facility out to all Members and expand the training packages available via the platform.

Staff surveys are undertaken on an annual basis and the content is used to develop appropriate training and to address any issues identified. Recent results of the staff survey were positive and reported improvements in all areas including, communication, motivation and general job satisfaction. It was also pleasing to report that absence due to sickness was at an all-time low. The Council is working to a recently refreshed and approved Workforce Development Plan and also has a Staff Engagement Group, drawn from staff across the Council. A Joint Staff Consultative Committee (JSCC) is in place consisting of staff members and Councillors and part of its remit is to review and approve staff related policies.

To improve the ability of managers with line management responsibility to fulfil their roles more effectively, the HR team hold a series of drop-in workshops where staff can raise issues and seek advice and guidance.

The Corporate Plan is communicated to staff and forms the golden thread for staff appraisals and work objectives for the forthcoming year and associated training/development needs. During 2019/20 much of the Council's training was again delivered via an on-line learning and development tool.

17. Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Objective: Establishing clear channels of communication with all sections of the community and other stakeholders, ensuring accountability and encouraging open consultation

The Council meets its statutory responsibilities with regard to engagement on budget setting by holding events with residents, parishes and businesses. The Council uses a variety of channels to communicate with the community and stakeholders; for example:

- West Lindsey Citizen Panel through surveys and focus groups
- West Lindsey District Council website
- Focus groups with residents and local businesses; including budget consultation events
- Parish Charter*
- E-surveys
- Local press
- Summits
- Social media

The Council uses social media as a communication tool and updates the website on a regular basis with relevant content. Use of social media as a communication tool has rapidly increased. Presently the Council has over 8,000 social media followers.

During 2019/20, the Council refreshed its Consultation & Engagement Strategy. The objectives of the strategy are twofold. Firstly to support strong, active and inclusive communities who can influence and shape the District and secondly, to create a more transparent and accountable council.

* A draft Parish Charter was written during 2019/20 and is currently out for consultation. The purpose of the Charter is to set out clearly the expectations Parish and Town Councils can have of the Council, and also what is expected of them; a two-way process. It also details plans for greater communication and engagement between all parties. It is intended to launch the Charter during 2020/21.

The Council consults on key service changes and issues that may affect residents of the District. Topics consulted on during 2019/20 included:

- Budget consultation 2019
- Later life housing survey
- Public Space Protection Order on Gainsborough Town Cemetery
- Waste Service satisfaction
- Communication with WLDC
- Trinity Arts Centre satisfaction

During the year surveys with service users were held (whether they are internal or external to the Council) to ascertain the levels of satisfaction with services. Results are used to develop services to ensure they are delivering the level of service expected by users.

The Council continues to actively support the Community Right to Bid initiative. During the year a number of applications from community groups have been

received and considered with decisions fed back. Furthermore, the Council places great importance on Neighbourhood Planning. Active support and encouragement is provided for communities to produce Neighbourhood Plans, so as to take an active role in determining the future development needs of their communities.

18. Partnership Governance

Objective: Enhancing the accountability for service delivery and effectiveness of other public service providers incorporating good governance arrangements in respect of partnerships and other joint working as identified by the Audit Commission's report on the governance of partnerships, and reflecting these in the authority's overall governance arrangements

To enhance the accountability for service delivery and effectiveness of other public service providers, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee have continued with their programme of holding meetings with strategic partners to discuss their approach to addressing the strategic needs of the residents of the District. During 2019/20 the Committee heard from the Environment Agency and Lincolnshire Police also provided the Committee with bi-annual reports on crime, disorder and public safety in West Lindsey.

Strategic partnership working is recognised by the Council as being integral to the achievement of its ambitions. Key partnerships have been formed in the areas of employment and skills, economic development and regeneration to deliver growth and support business across the District. Partnership working is also evident in the form of the Joint Planning Unit (created to devise and oversee delivery of the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan) and the Council's participation in Local Enterprise Partnerships.

The Council's Management Team sponsored a review of all current partnership arrangements in place across the Council to ensure on-going relevance and effectiveness. In conducting this work, reference was made to the Audit Commission's '[Governing Partnerships](#)' Report. The work involved the identification of the Council's key partnerships; their effectiveness and on-going relevance and put in place measures for the provision of regular reporting by the respective officer lead on the achievements, issues and future intentions of the relevant partnership. This assists in gauging whether any partnership is providing value for money. A summary report was presented to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee which endorsed the approach taken by the Council. To provide guidance for staff a Partnership ACoP is in place. The Council's Partnership Register has been cleansed and populated with up to date information.

The Council's current Contract Procedure Rules cover contract monitoring procedures and management of delivery. The accountability of service providers is managed through contract management and work has been undertaken to ensure The Council has robust contract management procedures in place.