

Draft Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

1. Scope of responsibility

- 1.1. East Cambridgeshire District Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. East Cambridgeshire District Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the ways in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 1.2. In discharging this overall responsibility, East Cambridgeshire District Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and this includes arrangements for the management of risk.
- 1.3. East Cambridgeshire District Council has approved and adopted a Local Code of Corporate Governance which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*. A copy of the Code is included on our website at <https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/>.
- 1.4. This statement explains how East Cambridgeshire District Council has complied with the principles of the Code and also meets the requirements of regulation 4 (3) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an Annual Governance Statement.

2. The purpose of the governance framework

- 2.1. The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled, and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with, and leads its communities. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost effective services.
- 2.2. The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of East Cambridgeshire 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.
- 2.3. The governance framework has been in place at East Cambridgeshire District Council for the year ended 31 March 2024 and up to the date of the approval of this statement.

3. The governance framework

The Council's Code of Governance recognises that effective governance is achieved through the following core principles:

- Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law
- Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
- Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits
- Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
- Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
- Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
- Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit, to deliver effective accountability

4. Key elements of the Governance Framework

The following is a brief description of the key elements of the systems and processes that comprise the Council's governance arrangements, including any developments in 2023/24 and areas of focus for 2024/25:



Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
Maintaining codes of conduct which define standards of behaviour for elected Members and staff, and policies dealing with whistleblowing and conflicts of interest and that these codes and policies are communicated effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Constitution contains a Members Code of Conduct, which is underpinned by the Principles of Public Life. Members are required to complete a declaration of interests which is published on the website for transparency.There is a separate Employee Code of Conduct, which is supported by HR policies and procedures. Codes, policies and procedures are shared with new employees as part of the induction process.The Council has a Whistleblowing Policy, which is available to employees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">During 2023/24, there were no Code of Conduct complaints against Councillors which were subject to investigation and conclusion.An updated Whistleblowing Policy was approved by Finance & Assets Committee in March 2024.
Ensuring compliance with relevant laws and regulations, internal policies and procedures, and that expenditure is lawful.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Corporate policies and strategies, which are regularly reviewed, are available on the Council website.The Constitution contains responsibilities for functions of the Council, Policy Committees, Regulatory Committees and other Committees, Joint Committees and Other Partnership Bodies. It also contains Proper Officer Functions and Rules of Procedure. The Monitoring Officer advises whether decisions are in accordance with the Constitution, and a summary list of responsibilities are included in a Monitoring Officer Protocol.The Council ensures compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations through a number of channels. The Chief Executive is responsible and accountable to the Council for all aspects of operational management. The Finance Manager & S151 Officer is responsible for ensuring that appropriate advice is given on financial matters, for keeping proper financial records and accounts, and for maintaining an effective system of internal control. The Legal Services Manager is responsible for ensuring that agreed procedures are followed and that all applicable statutes and regulations are complied with.The Localism Act 2011 requires the Council to prepare a Pay Policy Statement for each financial year. The Statement must be prepared and approved by the end of	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Preparation and delivery of new Member Induction, Training and Development Programme following elections in May 2023.During 2023/24, the HR team introduced two new and five updated HR policies, including: a new Business Travel and Expenses policy; a new Eyecare and Eyesight Testing policy; and updated policies on Remote Working, Redundancy, Flexible Retirement, Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) Pensions Discretions statement, and Agency and Other Off payroll Working.



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	<p>March each year. The 2023/24 Pay Policy was approved by Council in February 2024.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Managers within the Council are responsible for putting in place systems of control to ensure compliance with policies, procedures, laws and regulations. This is a key control and as such Service Leads are asked to provide annual assurance that they have promoted relevant policies and made sure that all staff are aware of relevant requirements and exercise due controls. Statements have been received from Service Leads in relation to 2023/24 and assurances have been provided that policies and procedures have been suitably promoted across the service and staff are aware of key policies, procedures and expected standards (including the receipt of gifts and hospitality, contract procedure rules and the Code of Conduct).Service Leads have provided assurance that they have maintained an up to date awareness of the latest legal requirements affecting their service and have noted where potential changes in legislation may require action in 2024/25.The Monitoring Officer issues reminders on the recording of gifts and hospitality via email to all staff, twice yearly.The Information Officer organises GDPR/Data Protection/Freedom of Information training for all staff on a yearly basis, including providing training at induction and when new changes take place, to ensure staff are kept up to date and are aware of their responsibilities. In 2023/24, 100% of staff completed this training.Training on Contract Procurement Rules is mandatory for all service leads at least once every three years.Children and Adults at Risk Safeguarding Policy adopted and available to stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Accessibility Guidelines were introduced in June 2023. Training to over sixty officers was delivered on these between June 2023 and February 2024.The Elections Act required Councils to ensure they were compliant with specific accessibility standards and introduction of Voter ID, which was enacted by the Council ahead of the May 2023 elections.During 2023, the service undertook a polling districts, polling places and polling stations review which was approved by Council in February 2024. The purpose of such a review is to ensure that residents have best access to a suitable polling station.Major changes in building control came into force between October 2023 and April 2024. Targets and key performance indicators have been aligned with the latest requirements. The Council now



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		<p>operates within a Building Safety Regulator (BSR) Code of Conduct and an Internal Building Control Charter sets out the requirements of staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Training on RIPA and Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS) was undertaken in September / October 2023.
Focus and further development for 2024/25		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Whistleblowing policy to be published and promoted after an external review of the Council's governance arrangements around the policy and further consideration by Finance and Assets Committee.• A social media policy has been drafted for staff – a draft is with CMT for consideration.• The Planning service will be seeking to reduce reliance on contract planners through recruitment of permanent staff and to increase use of Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) to ensure cost recovery.• To ensure corporate compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 statutory accessibility regulations for all councils published communications.• Expected changes arising from the Renters Reform Bill and Housing Health and Safety Rating System which will impact on enforcement activity. Without a clear understanding of if or when such changes will be introduced, the only action available to local authorities is to maintain an overview of forthcoming proposals for change and to ensure training and skills development for existing staff remains in place, with the ability to secure additional resource as required.• Further legislative changes expected include: Environment Act, Martyn's Law, Potential changes to Planning legislation/National Planning Policy Framework, Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, changes to Community Safety Partnership related powers and responsibilities. The Council will need to respond to changes arising in 2024/25. Building Safety Levy also to be applied from Autumn 2024.• Nationally, there has been growing concern regarding the level of abuse and harassment directed towards Councillors. In May 2024, the Council resolved to implement measures to support the Local Government Association's "Debate not Hate" campaign which will be developed during 2024/25.		



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Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ensuring the 2024 general election is compliant with accessibility standards and new requirements for overseas voters are implemented.		



Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
Documenting a commitment to openness and acting in the public interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none">There is public access to all Committee meetings except where items for discussion are of a confidential nature. The Council continues to be committed to ensuring that members of the public are involved in the decision making process.There are specific schemes in place to allow members of the public to speak at both Planning and Licensing Committee meetings, and the Council has also issued general guidance on public question time at other meetings, including Full Council.In order to demonstrate its openness, the Council also publishes on the website the Constitution, Council and Committee agendas, reports, minutes and decision lists.The Council publishes on its website the recommended datasets in accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government in February 2015.The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy sets out the Council's commitment to an inclusive and supportive environment for staff, Members, contractors and visitors that is free from discrimination.To demonstrate its compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty, the Council produced and published an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Monitoring Report which presents an analysis of the following areas:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Equality objectives;Service delivery;Equality impact assessments;Complaints and satisfaction;Access to information;Equality in employment;	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Council's gender pay gap was reported to Finance and Assets Committee in September 2023.Implementation of Voter ID for May 2023 Elections including comprehensive public awareness campaign.Ensuring accessibility of documents relating to Council and Committees on Council's website through redesign of agenda and report templates.



Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement		
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Gender Pay Gap;▪ Progress against the 2021-24 Equality Action Plan;▪ The Council's commitments for 2021-24. <p>This has been published on the Council's website.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) and Comprehensive Impact Assessments (CIAs) inform policy development and decision making. These are published on the Council's website.• e-learning training course for all staff and Members entitled 'Equality and Diversity Essentials.'	
Establishing clear channels of communication with all sections of the community and other stakeholders, ensuring accountability, and encouraging open consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Residents are regularly informed about the Council's activities through the Council website, work with the local media, social media and other channels.• The Council has adopted a Constitution which sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are taken and the procedures which should be followed. All meetings are open to the public except where there are confidential matters to discuss.• Community Engagement Strategy and Vulnerable Community Strategy adopted and subject to action plans.• The Council undertakes regular consultation exercises, ranging from small focus groups of customers to large scale questionnaires and face-to-face surveys. A Register of Consultees is held which gives individuals, community groups and associations the opportunity to consider new or revised policies, strategies or functions and to express their opinions, concerns and make suggestions. To encourage as wide a participation as possible, an invitation for further individuals to join the register is included in the Consultation section of the Council's website.• The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how the Council involves and consults with the public and wider stakeholders when planning for future local	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Communities and Partnerships service is responsible for the development and implementation of the Council's community engagement strategy, which along with the Vulnerable Community Strategy was updated in 2023/24. All services contributed to this and will assist with implementing the action plans.• Recent elections have required the Communications Team to ensure it communicates and engages with all



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Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
	<p>development across the District. This is published on the Council's website and covers consultation arrangements in respect of planning applications and planning policy matters, including the preparation of the Local Plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regular media releases are used as a means of keeping residents of the District informed of current and upcoming issues and Council decisions. The Council endeavours to ensure that all communications with the public are accessible to all by providing a translation service, large print and braille.• Equity of participation and wider social outcomes (e.g. in health) are fundamental principles of the Council's leisure service provision and is reflected in service specifications and the physical activity generation programme. The Healthy You Programme is based on community engagement and specific user feedback forms part of the evaluation process.• Further examples of community engagement and networking include Landlord Forums, Agents Forums, Taxi Driver Forums, Growth Hub, Chamber of Commerce, Growth Works with Skills and the East Cambs Business Boost.• Live web-streaming of Council and Committee meetings.• Youth engagement takes place through planned events.• The Healthy You programme is based on community engagement, and specific user feedback is part of the evaluation process.• User and non-user market research is incorporated into the service specification for the ECDC owned leisure centre ('The Hive') operated by GLL.	<p>population sectors, including the recognised 6% of the population considered to be made up of hard to reach groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Three Youth Fusion events were held over the summer of 2023.• Engagement events held informing stakeholders about the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.• The Communications team introduced a monthly monitoring and evaluation report to ensure the performance of the team is recorded against objectives and targets.• Negotiation protocol introduced to reduce the need for extensions of time for planning applications, and to give clear accountability in decision making.



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Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consultations on Economic Development are held as required for example business engagement with appropriate businesses and other stakeholders on a range of commercial and business advice issues such as business growth, grant funding opportunities and the Levelling Up programme opportunities where appropriate e.g. Get Set and Grow programme.
Focus and further development for 2024/25 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Communications Team is drafting a new policy to support the waste team with changes to bin services.• The Communications Team will be seeking to ensure proactive customer and stakeholder engagement takes places throughout the Council. As well as working closely with the Communities Team which has overall ownership of this, the Communications Team is proactively looking at ways engagement can be incorporated into its day to day work, for example through the Love Your Street project, hedgehog support work and website re-development.• Agents panel recommenced in May 2024 and will be held at least twice a year. Feedback from attendees to date has been positive.• Parish Council event to be held in 2024 to guide them on how best to interact with the planning service and contribute to planning decisions and to update on the changes in legislation within planning.• Updated the Community Engagement toolkit.• Introduction of a customer charter for Planning which will be published in 2024 to introduce service specific standards.		



Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Introduction of a negotiation protocol so that all stakeholders understand how the Planning service will engage with its customers post application submission was launched in May 2024. This will be continually reviewed.Target to update the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy for 2025-2028. Draft policy to be presented to committee in September 2024 to commence public consultation and proposed implementation date of 1st January 2025.Development of a feedback form for Building Control to be added to the website in 2024/25.		



Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
Developing and communicating a vision which specifies intended outcomes for citizens and service users and is used as a basis for planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Council has approved two Corporate Objectives;- To be financially self-sufficient and provide services driven by and built around the needs of our customers; and, To enable and deliver commercial and economic growth to ensure that East Cambridgeshire continues to be a place where people want to live, work, invest and visit.• The Corporate Plan for the period 2023-2027 was approved by Council in July 2023. It contains three themes which set out the main areas where the Council will concentrate work over the period:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Sound financial management○ Cleaner, greener East Cambridgeshire○ Sustainable communitiesWithin each of these themes the Council set out the priorities for the year. Details of all the above, together with any committee reports referred to in this statement, can be found on the Council's website.• The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is presented to Council on an annual basis to support the budget papers and the Corporate Plan. The MTFS sets out the level of savings that need to be achieved over the medium term. Savings plans and income generation targets are developed to achieve the budget requirement set out in the MTFS.• The Environment & Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan sets out the Council's vision, which is that by 2036 the Council's operations will reach net zero carbon emissions, and steps that will be taken to support our communities and East Cambridgeshire's biodiversity and environmental assets so they can adapt and flourish as the climate changes.• Silver level Investors in the Environment accreditation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Throughout 2023/24 the Communications Team worked closely with the Environment Team to promote and raise awareness of its list of top twenty actions. In summary, this involved promoting its hedgehog recovery strategy, achieving ongoing media coverage for its Pride of Place awards, helping the team achieve its bronze accreditation for Investors in the Environment and work towards its silver accreditation, raising awareness of Green Team actions through the Connect internal newsletter and carrying out an ongoing review of its web-text as part of the new website project.• The Communications Team also works closely with the Economic Development team helping to raise awareness of the team's projects on request. In 2023/24 this included helping to raise awareness of its digital signs initiative, supporting the team with its review of Explore East Cambs, help raise awareness of business grants and support for the Ely Business Awards. During this time



Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Local Enforcement Plan adopted in March 2023 which sets out level of service to expect for all stakeholders in enforcement service.	the Council also relaunched LinkedIn with a focus on the work being carried out by the Economic Development team.
Translating the vision into courses of action for the authority, its partnerships and collaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">During 2023/24 performance reporting against Service Delivery Plans was reported to respective committees during the year.Service Delivery Plans are reviewed every year in line with any changes to the Corporate Priorities and in accordance with the development of the budget to ensure the necessary resources are in place for their delivery.Staff appraisals and performance reviews are linked to corporate and service level plans.Where commissioned services are delivered jointly with partners this is reflected in service delivery plans and performance against both service delivery targets and budgets are monitored.There are service contracts in place between the Council and its Trading Companies. In addition, the Council, through the respective Shareholder Committee, approves each Trading Company business plan. There is a shareholder agreement in place between the respective companies and the Council.The Communications Team undergoes an annual call round of Parish Councils to assess their feedback on the service it provides.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Service Delivery Plans reviewed and approved by committees in March 2023, with six monthly progress updates.New Health and Wellbeing strategy was adopted in March 2024 which identified an action plan and targets. These have been aligned with service plans where they relate to internal actions.Working closely with the Integrated Neighbourhood Board, who will help deliver the recently adopted Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
Focus and further development for 2024/25		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Communication team will be working with all service leads to ensure the timely development of the new website project.The Communication team will also continue to work closely with the Environment Team and the Economic Development team to raise awareness of economic and environmental projects taking place across the District.Updated pre-application planning charges schedule for approval in June 2024.		



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

Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
<ul style="list-style-type: none">An area of challenge has been the performance standards relating to the use of paper and the target for 25% of councillors to receive their agendas electronically. The Council has legislative limitations, particularly in terms of producing election material, and Councillors must consent to stop receiving paper agendas. Whilst 26% of Councillors receive some papers electronically, only 11% are fully electronic. The democratic services team will continue to explore ways in which paper document production can be reduced.		



Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
Reviewing the effectiveness of the authority's decision-making framework, including delegation arrangements, decision making in partnerships and robustness of data quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Council's decision making framework is set out in the Council's Constitution including an effective scheme of delegation. The Council's Constitution is kept under continuous review in line with best practice.The Constitution includes the Shareholder Committee roles of the Finance and Assets Committee and the Operational Services Committee for the East Cambridgeshire Trading Company (ECTC) and East Cambridgeshire Street Scene (ECSS), respectively, and the Anglia Revenues Partnership Joint Committee.Business Continuity Management arrangements are in place to support delivery of services and outcomes in the case of unforeseen events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Cross party Constitutional Review Working Party reported on recommendations.
Measuring the performance of services and related projects and ensuring that they are delivered in accordance with defined outcomes and that they represent the best use of resources and value for money	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Performance management in the Council is based on the Corporate Plan priorities supported by Service Delivery Plans. The Council's two Policy Committees (Operational Services and Finance and Assets) approve and monitor performance against Service Delivery Plans.A summary of the overall performance of the Council, linked to the promises detailed in the Corporate Plan, is included in the introduction to the Statement of Accounts.The Council has established a robust financial planning process which includes a Medium-Term Financial Strategy, frequent budget monitoring reports to officers and quarterly budget monitoring reports to Policy Committees.Customer satisfaction surveys are issued by services such as the Care and Repair team. These seek to ensure that outcomes meet requirements i.e. improved accessibility and efficient and effective processes.Service Lead participation in professional networks enables sharing of latest best practice and benchmarking.Measurement of sickness absence performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Major Projects Steering Group attended each month by team leaders, key officers, service lead and director. Backlog has been significantly reduced and review of major projects to ensure S106 agreements are completed before reporting item to committee.



Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
Focus and further development for 2024/25		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Council services will be reviewing performance at the July 2024 General Election to ensure learnings can be applied. The Communications Team, for example, reviews each election and uses learnings from this to update its actions for the next one. This includes updating media contacts, capturing media feedback, ensuring communication deadlines are met and liaising closely with other departments in the Council to enhance future performance.• Building Control services in 2024/25 will be applying the new reporting mechanisms required by the Building Safety Regulator. Better use and additional modules of existing systems is being explored to streamline processes and support this reporting.• Chairs and lead officers will implement the revised arrangements for Committees as agreed by Council (ref: Recission Motion Agenda Item 11 – 24 May 2024).		



Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
Defining and documenting the roles and responsibilities of Members and management, with clear protocols for effective communication in respect of the authority and partnership arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Council's Constitution sets out how the Council operates and decisions are made. This contains separate articles and key documents covering the Member Code of Conduct, Proper Officer functions, and protocols for the Monitoring Officer.As the Head of Paid Service, the Chief Executive leads the officers and chairs the Council's Corporate Management Team. The other two statutory officers, the Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer report directly to the Chief Executive and are both members of the Corporate Management Team.Regular meetings are held between the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council and Corporate Management Team in order to maintain a shared understanding of roles and objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Democratic Services team attending and participating in national and regional events/consultations on review of national Members Code of Conduct.
Ensuring that financial management arrangements conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Council establishment includes a Chief Finance Officer (CFO), ensuring the financial management arrangements conform with the requirements within the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2015). This responsibility was discharged by the Director Finance, S151 Officer, during 2023/24.	
Ensuring effective arrangements are in place for the discharge of the Monitoring Officer function	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Monitoring Officer is a statutory appointment under Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. These responsibilities were delivered by the Legal Services Manager in 2023/24. The Monitoring Officer undertakes to discharge their statutory responsibilities with a positive determination and in a manner that enhances the overall reputation of the Council. In doing so they will also safeguard, so far as is possible, members and officers whilst acting in their official capacities, from legal difficulties and/or criminal sanctions.	



Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">It is important that Members and officers work together to promote good governance within the Council. The Monitoring Officer plays a key role in this and it is vital therefore, that Members and officers work with the Monitoring Officer to enable them to discharge their statutory responsibilities and other duties.There are working arrangements and understandings in place between the Monitoring Officer, members and the Corporate Management Team which are designed to ensure the effective discharge of the Council's business and functions. These arrangements are detailed in the Monitoring Officer Protocol, which is a key document in the Council's Constitution.	
Ensuring effective arrangements are in place for the discharge of the Head of Paid Service function	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The role of Head of Paid Service is defined in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. In East Cambridgeshire District Council, it is assigned to the Chief Executive as set out in the Constitution and all necessary powers are delegated to fulfil the statutory role.The Council is also required to provide the Head of Paid Service with staff, accommodation and other resources sufficient to enable the performance of the function. The annual budget proposed to Council, prepared by officers, seeks to align the provision of Council resources with the delivery of the Corporate Plan. In this manner, the Head of Paid Service is ensuring that the Council is fulfilling its duty.	
Providing induction and identifying the development needs of members and officers in relation to their strategic roles, supported by appropriate training	<ul style="list-style-type: none">There is a Member induction and training programme in place. Members are also required to undertake specific training before performing certain duties such as planning and licensing. Additional Member seminars are also arranged throughout the year to deal with specific issues as they arise.There is a new induction programme for all new employees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Member induction delivered in 2023, with nineteen different sessions included.Member seminars in 2023/24 included: June 2023: Environment Plan briefing



Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff training and development needs are reviewed at performance appraisals and supervision meetings.• All officer posts within the Council have a detailed job description and person specification. The development needs of officers are determined through an annual performance appraisal, a key outcome of which is a Personal Development and Training Plan. This Plan provides a link between service and corporate priorities and career development. Requests for professional/vocational training are presented to Corporate Management Team annually for final consideration.• Staff training includes modules relating to data protection, accessibility, fire safety, mental health at work, bomb threats, safeguarding, risk management and procurement compliance.• Continuous professional development completed by professional officers.• Succession planning within key service area roles.	<p>July 2023: Greater Cambs Partnership: Making Connections update</p> <p>September 2023: Home Energy Improvement Measures</p> <p>September 2023: Shareholder Seminar</p> <p>October 2023: North Ely Member Briefing</p> <p>October 2023: Obligations under the Environment Act 2021</p> <p>November 2023: Health and Wellbeing – the new health landscape</p> <p>January 2024: Council budget</p> <p>February 2024: Local Plan and Hedgehog SPD</p> <p>March 2024: Drainage infrastructure in the Fens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Officer induction process and coverage refreshed in 2023/24.
Ensuring arrangements are in place to maintain the health and wellbeing of the workforce and support individuals in	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Healthy You programme is promoted with Council staff.• Promotion of health and wellbeing resources available via the Council's intranet pages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flexible retirement policy reviewed and published.



Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
maintaining their own physical and mental wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remote Working Policy adopted and health and safety advice available to support staff working on and off site.• Grant funding is utilised to support health initiatives and to offer value for money services to residents to combat health inequalities.• Details of health and safety working group and codes of practice made available to all staff.	
Proactive and effective use of technology to support service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adoption of employee self-service systems for payroll and human resources activity. The HR service actively supports staff to access and use the HR and Payroll system. Using the Employee Self-Service (ESS) functionality, staff are able to submit mileage and expenses claims, childcare claims, book annual leave (and other forms of leave). The HR service also supports managers using the People Manager platform to manage their team's time and expenses claim forms, leave requests, sickness absence etc.• Refreshing and reviewing systems to ensure these remain effective and up to date.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• CivicaPay was updated in 2022 and Agresso in 2023 to ensure that any efficiency benefits built into these up-graded systems can be taken advantage of. As an example of this, all invoices are now held electronically within the system, thus removing the need for paper records.• Local land charges system upgraded, to enable delivery of a more digitised service.• Procurement of a new Learning Management System with access to a suite of e-learning courses and a content authoring tool to create and edit course content.• Investment into further online graphic design and photography training to keep the Council's digital and print communications to the highest standard.



Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Outgoing mail franking equipment and Papercut print management software have been updated to support the business continuity of these functions and to minimise the software security risk.Increased use of electronic working in Building Control enabled savings of £2k to be achieved in 2023/24 from reduced postage costs.
Focus and further development for 2024/25 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Planning service and Economic Development service both looking at improving use of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and improving customer experience across all areas including the display of information across the website.Introduce a Menopause at Work policy to develop understanding and support of menopause at work issues.Update the Family Friendly Guidance to include the new right to Carer's Leave and the changes to flexible working from April 2024.Training regarding the Council's PREVENT and domestic violence Duties is scheduled for June 2024.Formalise Opposition spokes briefings in accordance with Chief Executive briefing note to Members.		



Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
Reviewing the effectiveness of the framework for identifying and managing risks and for performance and demonstrating clear accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Council has a Risk Management Policy and framework to detail the approach to managing risks. The latest Policy was approved by Full Council in February 2024.The Council's Corporate Risk Register is the result of continuous review by a Risk Management Group, the Corporate Management Team and the Audit Committee, of the key risks that may have an impact on achieving the Council's objectives. Each risk shows the owner, the key controls in place to minimise any impact on the Council and its provision of services to stakeholders and sources of assurance. Individual projects and partnerships are also subject to risk assessments.Service Leads are asked to identify and highlight major risks at a service level for consideration by the Risk Management Group. Other service risks are managed by Service Leads via the Service Planning process.The Strategic Business Continuity Plan ensures that the Council is able to plan for, and respond to, a disruptive incident in order to continue service delivery and business operations at an acceptable predefined level.Risks are considered when drafting project and event plans and reviewed at the end of each stage, as part of the project planning process.The Communications Team regularly enters into new partnerships and collaborations. It carefully monitors all formal and informal agreements and carries out risk assessments as required, for example when contracting work on behalf of other service leads, or hosting publicity events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Risk management training took place in July 2023 for all elected Members.



Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
Ensuring compliance with the principles of the CIPFA Financial Management Code	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Council's s151 Officer's self-assessment in 2021/22 against key elements of the Code identified no areas requiring action for compliance.	
Ensuring an effective scrutiny function is in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Council has a Call-In and Referral Up Procedure which is part of the Constitution. This enables councillors to call in decisions made through the Policy Committees. Council can then consider the matter afresh and make a final decision which could be to uphold, amend or reject the previous decision of the Policy Committee.The Council provides Members to other Scrutiny Committees, where required, to review the performance and effectiveness of other public service providers as well as the Council. Examples include the Cambridgeshire Police & Crime Panel, Health & Wellbeing Board, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and the Community Safety Partnership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">An Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) was appointed to make recommendations on allowances paid to councillors. The recommendations were reported to Council in February 2024 where it was resolved unanimously that the recommendations of the IRP be approved, to take effect from 1st April 2024.
Ensuring effective counter fraud and anti-corruption arrangements are in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none">An Anti-fraud and Corruption Strategy is in place which includes procedures relating to Money Laundering and Bribery Act.The Council participates in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) exercises to identify potential indicators of fraud or error and is also participating in the Cambridgeshire Fraud Hub.Fraud reporting email address made available for reporting concerns. The Whistleblowing policy also provides a route for raising concerns in confidence.	



Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
Gaining assurance on risks associated with delivering services through third parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Council's Corporate Risk Register details the governance controls that it maintains over its trading companies, to ensure that any risks associated with these are quickly identified. As part of the processes included in this, is the need for the companies to produce an annual Business Plan that includes a risk management section for approval at Committee.	
Undertaking the core functions of an audit committee, as identified in Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police (CIPFA, 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Audit Committee for the financial year 2023/24 operated in line with a terms of reference and supporting procedure rules covering internal and external audit, risk management, annual statement of accounts, corporate governance and internal control arrangements, and anti-fraud and corruption arrangements.In accordance with guidance, the Audit Committee does not engage in decision making which would impact upon its independence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Audit Committee training delivered as part of Member induction.Audit Committee members participated in a self-assessment against the CIPFA 2022 guidance and devised an action plan for ongoing improvement.An Annual report to Council, reflecting on the work of the Committee was produced for 2023/24 and approved by Full Council in March 2024Terms of Reference of Audit Committee reviewed by Constitutional Working Group, including protocols.
Arrangements for managing data to ensure security, quality and accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Council has a Data Protection Officer (DPO) and Senior Information Responsible Officer (SIRO).Training is provided to staff on data protection, including as part of induction processes.Service Leads ensure data is managed in line with Council policy and procedure.	



Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Where parts of the service are outsourced or delivered in partnership, and the third party processes or has access to Council data, assurance is obtained from the third party regarding the robustness of systems and controls it has in place.	
Focus and further development for 2024/25		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Implementation of the new waste collection service - will commence from October 2024 and go live in April 2026.Development of the Bereavement Centre and new service design.		



Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit, to deliver effective accountability		
Key element	How the Council achieves this	Development in 2023/24
Ensuring that the authority provides timely support, information and responses to external auditors and properly considers audit findings and recommendations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Council provides support and information to the externally appointed auditors (Ernst & Young LLP). Audit findings and recommendations are reported through the Audit Committee.	
Incorporating good governance arrangements in respect of partnerships and other joint working and ensuring that they are reflected across the authority's overall governance structures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Council demonstrates a strong commitment to working in partnership with other agencies to deliver priority outcomes and ensure that this partnership activity provides value for money and added value.The governance arrangements for key partnerships are kept under review. Governance arrangements for significant partnerships, such as the East Cambridgeshire Trading Company, East Cambridgeshire Street Scene and the Anglia Revenues Partnership, are documented in the Constitution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">'The Hive' will be undergoing Quest Leisure benchmarking in 2024.Reviews of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with voluntary organisations were conducted during 2023/4 which contained recommendations that were approved by committee.
Ensuring an effective internal audit service with direct access to members is in place, providing assurance with regard to governance arrangements and that recommendations are acted upon	<ul style="list-style-type: none">During 2023/24 Internal Audit was delegated to North Northamptonshire Council which was led by a professionally qualified Chief Internal Auditor in accordance with the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Public Service Organisations, Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the Local Government Application Note.The Internal Audit Charter is in line with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and provides for the necessary access required to exercise this key role.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Self-assessment against the Role of the Head of Internal Audit statement from CIPFA (2018) completed and actions taken to further support the effective working with internal audit, including engagement with CMT and on major project planning.Implementation of 83% of agreed actions from Internal Audit reports due during 2023/24.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Chief Internal Auditor has been a regular attendee at Audit Committee meetings and progress reports on delivery of the audit plan have been provided throughout the financial year.Implementation of audit recommendations are subject to monthly follow ups by the Internal Audit team and progress is reported to every Committee meeting via a progress report.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">As a result of the internal audit of Enforcement, for example, the Food Safety, Health and Safety, Environmental Crime and Private Sector Housing and Licensing enforcement policies have all been reviewed and approved by the appropriate committees.
<p>Focus and further development for 2024/25</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">To receive and consider briefings from Internal Audit in 2024/25 regarding the new Global Internal Audit Standards.		

5. Review of effectiveness

- 5.1. East Cambridgeshire 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 of effectiveness is informed by the work of the directors within the Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Chief Internal Auditors annual report, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.
- 5.2. The following is a brief description of the roles and processes that have been applied in evaluating the effectiveness of the governance framework:

1. The Council

- In July 2023 the Council approved the Corporate Plan for 2023-2027 which forms the basis of the performance management framework. Council reviews progress against the plan, ensuring it remains committed to the priorities whilst delivering a balanced budget.
- Council approved financial documents including the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, Capital Strategy, General Fund Revenue Budget, Treasury Management Strategy, and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy provides the financial structure for the policy and budget framework, corporate planning, annual service planning and budget setting.
- Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires that every local authority shall make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and shall ensure that one of their officers has responsibility for administration of those affairs. This role was discharged by the Council's Director, Finance and S151 Officer during 2023/24.
- The CIPFA Financial Management Code published in October 2019 sets out the financial standards of financial management for local authorities. Full adoption of the Code commenced on 1st April 2021. A self-assessment by the s151 Officer in 2021/22 did not highlight any areas of non-conformance with key principles of the Code. An independent review by Internal Audit of the self-assessment was also conducted and areas for further consideration have been reported.
- The Council has appointed Independent Persons in accordance with the standards framework to be compliant with the Localism Act 2011. The appointments were approved by Finance and Assets Committee in May 2023.
- Council approved key strategies and policies such as the Corporate Plan and the revised Corporate Risk Management Policy are in place and communicated.

2. The Finance and Assets Committee

- The Committee reviewed and noted quarterly budget monitoring reports and regular updates on assets.
- The Committee recommend that Council approve financial reports, such as the Treasury Management Strategy, Treasury Management Annual Performance Review, the Annual Investment Strategy, Revenue Budgets, Capital Strategy,

Council Tax, overall Council Budget reports, and reviewed the minutes of the ARP Joint Committee, as the partnership which delivers revenues and benefits for the Council.

- In undertaking its role as the Shareholder Committee for East Cambridgeshire Trading Company (ECTC), the Committee approved the Business Plan for 2023/24 (March 2023) and 2023/24 (March 2024). The Committee also noted the ECTC accounts for 2022/23 in September 2023.
- The Committee approved the Health and Safety policy 2023.
- The Committee received the annual Health and Safety report for 2023 in July 2023. This provided a summary of East Cambridgeshire District Council (Council), East Cambs Trading Company (ECTC) and East Cambs Street Scene (ECSS) health and safety performance to the end of the financial year 2022/23 and set out the commitments relating to health and safety for the year 2023/24.
- The Committee received the annual Gender Pay report including actions aimed at reducing the gender pay gap.
- The Committee received an Asset Management Plan in March 2024.

3. The Audit Committee

- The Committee performed the role of the Audit Committee as defined by the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, which covered internal and external audit matters, risk management arrangements, corporate governance including internal control arrangements and the annual governance statement, anti-fraud and corruption arrangements, and the statement of accounts.
- The Committee received reports on corporate risks, the work and findings of internal audit, including the annual report, and external audit reports, letters and briefings. It also reviewed and approved the Annual Governance Statement for 2022/23.
- The committee received regular updates on the outcome of internal audit assignments and the implementation of actions agreed based on those findings.
- Members of the Committee engaged in a self-assessment against the latest CIPFA guidance on Audit Committees to identify areas for further development.
- The Council has appointed a non-voting lay member to the Audit Committee.

4. The Operational Services Committee

- The Committee received and noted budget monitoring reports.
- The Committee approved the Council's fourth Environment and Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, dated June 2023.
- The Committee received a progress report against the East Cambridgeshire Youth Action Plan 2021-24 and an update on developments from the Outdoor Sports and Playing Pitch Strategy. An update on the Community Safety Partnership was also received for the Committee's noting.

- The Committee received the enforcement policies for food safety and health and safety or approval ahead of consultation.
- In March 2023, the Committee approved the updated Local Enforcement Plan (LEP) relating to Planning Enforcement, in accordance with an Internal Audit recommendation highlighting that this was overdue for review. This is now due to be subject to three yearly review by the Committee going forward.
- In undertaking its role as the Shareholder Committee for East Cambridgeshire Street Scene (ECSS), the Committee received performance reports for the delivery of the waste and street cleansing services by ECSS. The Committee also approved the ECSS Business Plan for 2023/24 and half yearly performance report. The Committee also noted the ECSS statutory accounts for 2022/23.

5. Relationship between the Council and its Trading Companies

The shareholder arrangements for the Finance and Assets and Operational Services Committee are detailed above. In addition, there are a number of matters reserved for Council (as the sole shareholder) as detailed in the Shareholder Agreement. The Council continues to implement the revised arrangements for the membership of the ECTC and ECSS board and wider member scrutiny (ref: Council – 17 October 2019 Agenda Item 14 and 15) specifically the appointment of the Leader of Council or Deputy Leader of Council and the respective Chairman of Committee to the Boards as Observers, the membership of the Boards to include the respective Director, delegations of functions of Council to the respective Committee to meet its shareholder responsibilities and an annual all member shareholder seminar. The shareholder agreement will be reviewed for approval by Council in July 2024 to reflect recommendations from Internal Audit and existing informal practices.

6. Internal audit

- The Council takes assurance about the effectiveness of the governance environment from the work of Internal Audit, which provides independent and objective assurance across the whole range of the Council's activities. It is the duty of the Chief Internal Auditor to give an opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control within the Council. This opinion has been used to inform the Annual Governance Statement.
- The Chief Internal Auditor's annual report was presented to the Audit Committee in July 2024. This report outlined the key findings of the audit work undertaken during 2023/24 including any areas of significant weakness in the internal control environment.
- The Chief Internal Auditor's annual opinion for 2023/24 is that:

I am satisfied that sufficient internal audit work has been undertaken to inform an opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and internal control for 2023/24. In giving this opinion, it should be noted that assurance can never be absolute. The most that the internal audit service can provide is reasonable assurance that there are no major weaknesses in the system of internal control.

It is my opinion that **Moderate Assurance** can be given over the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's control environment for 2023/24 – see definition in report. This control environment comprises of the system of internal control, governance arrangements and risk management. Any limitations over this opinion are detailed and explained further below.

Financial control

Controls relating to the Council's key financial systems which were reviewed during the year were all concluded to be operating at a level of Moderate Assurance or above, with 92% of opinions given being of Good or Substantial Assurance.

Assurance over the outsourced revenues and benefits service has been provided in the form of internal audit reports issued for the Anglia Revenues Partnership shared service. These have all resulted in assurance opinions of 'Adequate / Reasonable', which is comparable to the Council's internal audit service's assurance opinion of 'Moderate'. This indicates a reduced assurance opinion from previous years, where areas of 'enforcement' and 'Council Tax Billing, Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme' had received 'Good' assurance opinions in 2022/23. Action plans are in place for areas of improvement.

Risk management

The Council's structures and processes for identifying, assessing and managing risk have remained generally consistent during 2023/24.

Internal control

For the audits completed by the Internal Audit service in 2023/24, 97% of the opinions given in relation to the control environment and compliance have been of at least Moderate Assurance. The only opinion of Limited Assurance was in relation to Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) compliance. An action plan was agreed in relation to these findings and promptly progressed, providing assurance over actions taken to address areas of weakness. There have been no reports issued with an opinion of 'high' organisational impact.

The audit plan coverage had targeted areas of known risk and was informed through consultation with senior management and the Audit Committee.

Of the agreed management actions due for implementation during 2023/24, 83% were completed during the year.

There have been no incidences during 2023/24 where the internal audit team have highlighted a fundamental risk or weakness and management have sought to accept the risk, rather than agree an appropriate action.

Internal Audit has not been made aware of any further governance, risk or internal control issues which would reduce the above opinion. No systems of controls can provide absolute assurance against material misstatement or loss, nor can Internal Audit give that assurance.

7. External audit

- Under the Government's local public audit regime, the Audit Commission initially, and more recently Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited, have awarded contracts for work previously carried out by the Audit Commission's audit practice.

As a result Ernst & Young (now EY) became the appointed external auditor for East Cambridgeshire District Council from 1st September 2012.

- EY's draft audit results report for the financial year 2021/22 was presented to Audit Committee in March 2023, with a final version being issued on the 24th July 2023 shortly after the Accounts were signed off by the Section 151 Officer.

8. Other inspection agencies

- A Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO) inspection took place in December 2024. The follow up letter from the IPCO indicated satisfaction that ongoing compliance with RIPA 2000 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 will be maintained, and the Council will not require a further inspection until the end of 2026.
- The Council has also put itself forward for a Peer Review, this will take place in February 2025.

6. Significant governance issues and actions

The review of the effectiveness of the Governance Framework has provided a satisfactory level of assurance. The review process has highlighted the following significant issue:

- Delays in the completion of the External Audit of the Council's Statement of Accounts, outside of the Council's control or influence. This has been noted as a national issue, with a substantial number of local authorities subject to delays in audits and is due to delays and resource pressures reported by the External Auditors. The delays impact on the assurances available and, as such, are considered to be an issue for inclusion in this Annual Governance Statement. It appears likely that the 2022/23 Accounts will remain unaudited.

7. Conclusion

Based on the work that has been completed, assurance can be taken that the governance arrangements at East Cambridgeshire District Council are fit for purpose.

8. Statement by Leader of the Council and Chief Executive

The Council has in place strong governance arrangements which we are confident protect its interests and provide necessary assurances to the community and stakeholders.

We propose over the coming year to continually address any issues arising that need addressing in order to further enhance its governance arrangements.

Signed:

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Anna Bailey

Leader of the Council

Date:

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John Hill

Chief Executive

Date: