

REPORT TO	DATE OF MEETING
Governance Committee	29 January 2015

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SUBJECT	PORTFOLIO	AUTHOR	ITEM
Corporate Governance Progress Report	N/A	Ian Parker	6

0 SUMMARY AND LINK TO CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 0.1 The report provides an update on the progress that has been made to strengthen the Council's governance arrangements. The action reported on covers cross cutting activities and spans all of the Council's priorities.

1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 That the Committee note, review and comment on the actions and progress reported on.

2 DETAILS AND REASONING

- 2.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations require the council to conduct a review of the effectiveness of the internal control environment and to publish a statement on the adequacy of the system with its annual accounts.
- 2.2 Additionally, the Corporate Governance Senior Officer Group completes the Corporate Governance Action Plan (attached) detailing progress against a suite of actions. The reporting timescale for the Action Plan is to January 2015.

3 HIGH LEVEL SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

- 3.1 External Audit provided a comprehensive overview of the Council and its control arrangements, providing this Committee with positive assurance. More recently, the External Auditors have completed their assessment of Housing Benefit as outlined earlier in the agenda, giving that service a clean bill of health, identifying only a small error rate that did not impact on the Department for Work and Pension's Housing Benefit Certified Claim. An extract from DWP's letter is below. A more comprehensive report can be scheduled for a future Governance Meeting.

Housing Benefit 2013/14 Certified Claim

Following receipt of your 2013/14 certified claim, I can confirm that as there are no outstanding issues relating to the claim, it is acceptable to the Department and the total amount of HB subsidy properly payable to your authority for 2013/14 is £23,072,625.

Your claim has been settled on this basis and therefore is now closed. It should be noted, however, that this does not prejudice re-opening of your 2013/14 subsidy claim should new information, relating to that claim, be brought to the Department's attention.

- 3.2 In the area of Anti-fraud & Corruption, all policies have been reviewed and updated, including a re-write of the Whistleblowing policy in line with national codes of best practice. These revised policies will be shared with staff and also included as part of induction.

- 3.3 The review of the Joint Procurement Strategy has been completed and presented at Shared Services Committee and approved by Cabinet in January 2015.
- 3.4 IT software used in Gateway has been enhanced to allow for a rolling customer satisfaction survey to be undertaken throughout the year. This provides various committees and services with invaluable information regarding service delivery – more importantly, how customers rate the Council and the service they receive.
- 3.4.1 The same software has been further developed to deal with complaints. The process now sees complaints recorded on the system and monitored through to resolution. The system has in-built timescales, which if missed, leads to automatic escalation. This approach has been particularly welcomed by the external assessor for Customer Excellence Award.
- 3.4.2 The issue of vexatious complaints (very few in number) has been reviewed and processes refined that both protect the Council, its services and its staff.
- 3.5 The review of the Employee Code of Conduct is all but complete. It will be formally reported to the Standards Committee and subject to approvals will be adopted later in the year. Trade Union consultation was positive and no issues were identified with the draft.
- 3.6 South Ribble Borough Council recognises the hard work, dedication and commitment that staff throughout the Council bring; to ensure staff continue to be equipped with the necessary skills to drive service delivery forward; this Council has invested heavily in staff development. The prestigious Investors in People award was successfully retained.

4 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- 4.1 The Transparency Agenda continues to require Councils to publish an increasing range of information across a plethora of services. Latterly these requirements have extended to include, amongst other things, Car Parking income information and Anti-fraud activities.
- 4.2 There is an ongoing requirement to ensure that the policies that have been reviewed, updated, amended and/or comprehensively rewritten, become embedded throughout the organisation. These include, Employee Code of Conduct, a number of HR Policies and the revised Whistleblowing Policy.
- 4.3 Work is well underway to complete the Committee's requirement to review membership, reporting, maintaining and relevance of outside bodies. This scheduled piece of work is to be reported by the Task Group in February 2015.

WIDER IMPLICATIONS

In the preparation of this report, consideration has been given to the impact of its proposals in all the areas listed below, and the table shows any implications in respect of each of these. The risk assessment which has been carried out forms part of the background papers to the report.

FINANCIAL	There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.		
LEGAL	There are no legal implications arising from this report.		
RISK	The delivery of the actions identified in this report will enhance our governance and business control status thus minimising risk.		
THE IMPACT ON EQUALITY	The Corporate Governance Action Plan is not considered to have any adverse impact on equality. In accordance with the council's Project Management Framework an Equality Impact Assessment is undertaken and reported on each individual project.		
OTHER (see below)			
<i>Asset Management</i>	<i>Corporate Plans and Policies</i>	<i>Crime and Disorder</i>	<i>Efficiency Savings/Value for Money</i>
<i>Equality, Diversity and Community Cohesion</i>	<i>Freedom of Information/ Data Protection</i>	<i>Health and Safety</i>	<i>Health Inequalities</i>
<i>Human Rights Act 1998</i>	<i>Implementing Electronic Government</i>	<i>Staffing, Training and Development</i>	<i>Sustainability</i>

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS