

# Annual Governance Statement 2022/23

## Scope of responsibility

1. Vale of White Horse District Council ensures that its business is conducted legally and to proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded, accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. Under the Local Government Act 1999 the council makes arrangements for continuous improvement, with a view to economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The council must make arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating effective exercise of functions, including the management of risk.
2. Vale of White Horse District Council's corporate governance arrangements are included as part of the council Constitution, approved by full Council Committee. The council has adopted a local code of governance which is consistent with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's publication "*Delivering Good Governance in Local Government.*"
3. This Annual Governance Statement explains how the council has complied with its code of governance, and how it met the requirements of regulation six of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 in relation to an annual review of the effectiveness of the council's systems of internal control, and the preparation and approval of this statement.
4. Our website at [www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk) has a copy of the local code of corporate governance within its Constitution or it can be obtained from:

Democratic Services  
Vale of White Horse District Council  
Abbey House,  
Abbey Close,  
Abingdon,  
OX14 3JE  
Tel. 01235 422520  
Email: [democratic.services@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@southandvale.gov.uk)

## **The purpose of the governance framework**

5. The governance framework comprises the systems, processes, culture and values which direct and control the council, and activities through which it accounts to, engages with, and leads the community. The framework enables the council to monitor achievement of its strategic objectives and consider whether appropriate and cost-effective services have been delivered by those objectives.
6. The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It is not possible to eliminate all risk of failure to achieve the council's objectives and therefore the framework can only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. An ongoing internal control process is employed, which is designed to identify and prioritise risks to the achievement of the council's objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks, and mitigate their impact.

## **The governance framework**

7. Full Council is responsible for directing and controlling the organisation through the governance framework, doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, and in a timely manner. Full Council's responsibilities include agreeing the Constitution and key governance documents and agreeing the policy framework and the budget.
8. The council has executive arrangements in place consisting of a cabinet, a scrutiny committee and a joint scrutiny committee with South Oxfordshire District Council. Where this document refers to joint proceedings, this will be with South Oxfordshire District Council unless stated otherwise. Cabinet is responsible for proposing the budget and policy framework and implementing them once approved by Council. The scrutiny function allows a committee to question and challenge the policy and performance of Cabinet and promote public debate.
9. The Chief Executive advises councillors on policy and procedures to drive the aims and objectives of the council. As head of paid service, the Chief Executive oversees the employment and conditions of staff. The Chief Executive leads a senior management team, shared with South Oxfordshire District Council. The Chief Finance Officer, the Monitoring Officer, Deputy Chief Executives and Heads of Service are responsible for advising Cabinet and scrutiny committees on legislative, financial and other policy considerations to achieve the council's objectives. These officers are responsible for implementing councillors' decisions.
10. The governance framework for 2022/23 was based on the council's code of governance. This aims to meet the principles of good governance in all aspects of its work, with careful attention to the following main principles:
  - Focusing on the council's purpose and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area
  - Councillors and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles
  - Promoting values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour

- Taking informed and transparent decisions, which are subject to effective scrutiny
- Managing risks
- Developing the capacity and capability of councillors and officers to be effective
- Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability

## **Review of effectiveness of the governance framework**

12. The council has responsibility for reviewing, at least annually, the effectiveness of its governance framework, including the system of internal control. This review is informed by the work of managers who have responsibility for the upkeep of the governance environment, the internal audit manager's annual report, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.
13. The following section sets out tables showing:
  - the governance issues affecting the council;
  - how the council has tackled these issues in 2022/23 and the controls it has in place to ensure good governance; and
  - any actions identified to improve the council's governance.

## The strategic planning framework

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
1	How does the council ensure it undertakes its responsibilities correctly?	<p>The Council follows CIPFA guidance on good governance. Openness, accountability and stakeholder consultation are key to this and incorporated in the corporate plan and embedded into working practices.</p> <p>To undertake responsibilities correctly, the Council consults stakeholders as well as adhering to the law and regulatory responsibilities. The Strategic Planning Framework incorporates residents' and service-providers' views, as well as national and local priorities. The council periodically conducts a residents' survey to ensure the council's objectives reflect residents' priorities. Recent surveys, consultations and engagement reports are published on the website. <a href="#">Public consultations link</a></p>	To review the council's Engagement Strategy.
2	Where are the council's corporate priorities?	<p>During 2020, the public were successfully consulted on the new Corporate Plan 2020-24, which has six key themes. Results were published in October 2020 and the Corporate Plan was adopted at a Full Council meeting in October 2020.</p> <p>The themes in the plan are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Providing the homes people need</li> <li>2. Tackling the Climate Emergency</li> <li>3. Building healthy communities</li> <li>4. Building stable finances</li> <li>5. Working in partnership</li> <li>6. Working in an open and inclusive way</li> </ol> <p>The council's Corporate Plan and Performance Reports can be downloaded from the following location: <a href="#">Corporate Plan link</a></p>	To continue to monitor progress of the Corporate Plan 2020-24 and make any necessary improvements as a result of the monitoring process.
3	How does the council address issues beyond its legal control and geographic limits?	<p>The council works with partners to address local and wider issues. This is done through either formal partnerships or more informal liaison with other service providers. Examples of the formal partnerships include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future Oxfordshire Partnership and its advisory groups.</li> <li>• Enterprise Zones</li> </ul>	Continue partnership work and consider new partnership arrangements that benefit local people

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South and Vale Community Safety Partnership</li> <li>• Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee</li> </ul>	and help the council to address and input into issues that affect it and are outside of geographical and legal control.
4	What other key strategic planning strategies does the council have?	<p>The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1 was adopted at Full Council in December 2016; and Local Plan 2031 Part 2 was adopted by Full Council in October 2019.</p> <p>A Local Plan Part 1 review (LPP1) took place (five-year review) and on 3 December 2021 was approved by Cabinet. Adoption statements and evidence base and Local Plan review can be found <a href="#">here</a></p> <p>In March 2021 Full Council decided to prepare the next Local Plan as a joint plan with South Oxfordshire District Council. During 2021-22, the Joint Local Plan Governance arrangements were established, which were first approved in August 2020. The current version can be located here: <a href="#">Joint Local Plan governance arrangements</a></p> <p>Further information on the Joint Local Plan 2041 can be found <a href="#">here</a></p>	To work with South Oxfordshire District Council to develop the 2041 Joint Local Plan

## The performance management framework

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
5	How does the council set performance targets to achieve its strategic objectives?	<p>In the Corporate Plan 2020/24, the council has set performance targets to achieve its strategic objectives and corporate priorities. A corporate delivery plan ensures that the council meets targets and achieves objectives. This is monitored by Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet and a report is published on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>The council shares its Senior Management Team and staff with South Oxfordshire District Council.</p>	To monitor the progress of Corporate Plan delivery in the year 2023/24.

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
		<p>Joint working has many benefits for both councils where there are many shared visions, priorities and projects.</p> <p>Service areas have service plans to implement objectives and meet targets. Staff have individual workplans and targets, ensuring that they work towards achieving a <i>golden thread</i> that aligns the council's top-level objectives to the work of each council officer. Managers are responsible to ensure these have been met.</p>	<p>Continued flexibility of staffing and assessment of resource distribution when needed.</p> <p>Continue to align service area and staff priorities with corporate priorities</p>
6	How does the council monitor performance against key targets?	<p>The Senior Management Team receive regular board reports, which monitor performance of key measures. Analysis of the board report demonstrates that the council is meeting most of the key performance measures. In addition, the analysis shows a long-term, on-going trend of improvement.</p> <p>Staff performance objectives and reviews link with the corporate objectives.</p>	<p>To ensure the presentation of the board report is kept under review to measure performance against the strategic objectives.</p> <p>To continue to implement performance monitoring of the Corporate Plan.</p>
7	Does the council monitor its performance against others?	<p>Senior Management receive regular reports which monitor performance of key measures.</p> <p>The council works collaboratively with Oxfordshire County Council and local district councils to share ideas and new initiatives. The council monitors its performance nationally, for example, recycling rates, employment figures etc.</p> <p>For example, for recycling – Vale was joint third highest local authority in 2022/23 at 63.3%</p>	<p>To continue to review the council's performance with benchmarking work.</p> <p>Continue to look out for new opportunities and good initiatives</p>

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
8	How does the council monitor its contractors' performance?	<p>The council operates a formal framework for monitoring contractors' performance and has officers monitoring performance on a regular basis. For the major contracts, monitoring reports are submitted to the Joint Scrutiny Committee and a report is made to the relevant Cabinet member.</p> <p>Officers work closely with contractors to ensure timely data reporting. Data on key performance indicators (KPIs) is collected and presented by officers and undergoes scrutiny review. For corporate contracts with Capita, the council has membership to a Joint Committee to monitor the contracts under the Five Councils Partnership.</p> <p>The same standards of the council are expected of contractors and this is challenged through regular review, as well as highlighting achievement and improvement.</p>	To continue to scrutinise contractors' performance and use feedback to improve where needed and possible.

## The legal framework

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
9	How does the council ensure it is acting lawfully?	The council employs a Monitoring Officer, who is responsible for ensuring the council acts lawfully. The Monitoring Officer will report directly to full Council or to Cabinet where it is considered that any proposal, decision or omission would give rise to unlawfulness, or to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee, if any decision or omission has given rise to maladministration.	
10	How does the council ensure lawful decision-making? Does it have proper procedures in place?	The council's Constitution sets out how decision-making is managed and guides decision-making towards objectives and includes a set of procedure rules that govern how the council conducts its business. The Constitution also includes protocols covering the disclosure of interests in contracts and the relationship between officers and councillors.	Continued review of Constitution

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
		The Monitoring Officer is responsible for ensuring the lawfulness of decision-making and maintaining the Constitution. The Constitution sets out the terms of reference to each committee and the level of delegated authority to officers.	Continued monitoring of legislative changes and updating any relevant process and documents for the council.
11	Does the council have a leader and a cabinet?	The Council appoints a leader, having adopted the 'strong leader' model under the Part three of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The leader has delegated authority to Cabinet members to make decisions within a given remit. Individual Cabinet member decisions (ICMD) are recorded and published. Any key decisions taken by Cabinet, an individual Cabinet member or an officer are subject to the council's scrutiny call-in procedure, which is set out in the council's Constitution.	Training that covers ICMD and call-in procedures in 2023/24.
12	Do officer reports to council meetings contain legal advice?	All officer reports to the Council, Cabinet or committee meetings contain a section on the legal implications of taking a decision. All draft reports are subject to consultation with Senior Management Team, legal and finance officers before publication.	Officer training in 2023/24 to strengthen report writing, with advice, including request to submit legal advice requests in good time to enable through review by Legal.
13	How does the council ensure councillors uphold strong ethical standards?	<p>The council's Constitution incorporates the Councillors' Code of Conduct, which requires high standards of conduct. The Monitoring Officer provides training to councillors on compliance with the Councillors' Code of Conduct.</p> <p>Code of conduct complaints are recorded and managed accordingly, and a yearly report is provided to Joint Audit and Governance Committee on complaints and their outcomes. Details of the Councillors' Code of Conduct and associated documents can be found <a href="#">here</a></p>	Councillor Code of Conduct to be implemented and training will be provided to councillors by the Monitoring Officer.



Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
14	Does the council's legal team meet the high-quality standards?	Lexcel is the Law Society's accreditation quality mark. This has been awarded to the council's legal team, which undergoes a rigorous independent assessment each year to ensure that it meets the required standards of excellence in areas such as customer care, case management and risk management.	To continue to ensure the council meets the Law Society's Lexcel accreditation quality mark.

## The financial framework

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
15	How does the council ensure correct financial procedures?	<p>The council appoints a Section 151 Officer, who is responsible for the overall management of its financial affairs. The Section 151 Officer determines all financial systems, procedures and supporting records of the council, after consultation with Acting Deputy Chief Executives and Heads of Service. Any new or amended financial systems, procedures or practices are agreed with the Section 151 Officer before implementation.</p> <p>Click the following link to access published finances <a href="#">Our Finances</a></p>	Ongoing development of the financial systems to support more efficient working practices and to aid financial management
16	How do councillors and officers work together to ensure financial accountability?	<p>Cabinet and the Senior Management Team exercise collective responsibility for financial matters. All members of the Senior Management Team accept individual and collective responsibility for the use of resources and financial accountability. Senior Management Team supports Cabinet in the budget-setting process before Cabinet recommends the budget to full Council.</p> <p>Portfolio holders have meetings with service managers on developments in their area. Officers provide briefings and information to assist Portfolio holders in their role.</p> <p>All councillor briefings are held to keep members up to date on developments.</p>	Further budget challenge activity in setting the 2023/24 budget
17	Who approves the budget?	Full Council is responsible for setting the budget and the council tax. The budget setting includes the revenue budget for the forthcoming	

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		<p>year, and the capital programme for the forthcoming five-year period. The Council also approves a medium-term financial plan for the next five years and a capital strategy for the forthcoming ten-year period. This ensures better long-term financial planning.</p> <p>The Section 151 Officer reports to Council on the robustness of the budget of the financial estimates and the adequacy of reserves.</p>	
18	Does the council share resources to save costs?	To save costs, the council shares its staff and office resources with South Oxfordshire District Council. The council has several joint contracts to achieve efficiency savings.	<p>To continue to find ways of sharing costs in 2023/24</p> <p>Ongoing efficiencies from office reorganisation and hybrid working.</p>
19	How does the council manage its financial investments?	<p>Full Council is responsible for approving the Treasury Management Strategy. This governs the operation of the council's treasury function and is reviewed at least annually or when otherwise necessary. This strategy includes parameters for lending and borrowing and identifies the risks of treasury activity.</p> <p>The Joint Audit and Governance Committee and Cabinet review the draft strategy proposals before they are recommended to Council. The Joint Audit and Governance Committee and Cabinet review the operation of the current strategy with mid-year and end of year monitoring reports, which are also recommended to Council.</p>	
20	Once the budget is set, how is it implemented?	Cabinet has overall responsibility for the implementation of the council's financial strategies and spending plans. It is authorised to make financial decisions, subject to these being consistent with the budget and policy framework and the Constitution. Cabinet receives periodic budget monitoring reports. Heads of service are required to provide	To present regular budget monitoring reports to Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
		<p>reasons for budget variances; these recorded in the budget monitoring report.</p> <p>In year budget virements can be considered as set out in the Constitution. This ensures that the council is able to realign resources to ensure that over- or underspends do not impact on its ability to deliver services.</p> <p>In exceptional circumstances, as experienced during 2020/21 with the Coronavirus pandemic, the budget may need to be increased in year. This increase must be agreed by full Council.</p>	
21	How are finances managed at service level?	Deputy Chief Executives and Heads of Service are responsible for ensuring the proper maintenance of financial procedures and records, and the security of assets, property, records, and data within their service area, and for ensuring that the services that they are responsible for are delivered within budget.	
22	Is the management of budgets subject to audit?	Internal Audit conducts a periodic review of the council's budgetary control and considers budget implications in any review undertaken.	To ensure that budget management is included in all reviews where possible.
23	Do officer reports to council meetings contain financial advice?	All officer reports to the Council, Cabinet or committee meetings contain a section on the financial implications of taking a decision. All draft reports are subject to consultation with Senior Management Team, legal and finance officers before publication.	
24	How are the council's accounts approved?	The council prepares a set of <a href="#">financial statements</a> each year, which are submitted to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee for approval.	To complete the 2023/24 statement of accounts during 2024/25
25	Are the accounts audited?	The council's financial statements are audited by its external auditor, Ernst and Young (EY). Each year's accounts and EY's annual Audit Letter are available to the public and are published on the council's website. The audited accounts and the external auditor's report are considered by the Joint Audit and Governance Committee.	

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
		The audited 2021/22 statement of accounts are available on our <a href="#">website</a>	
26	How does the council ensure it follows the correct accountancy practices?	Officers keep up to date with the latest accounting developments, which enable them to be prepared for the changes in accounting practice that affect the preparation and presentation of the financial statements. The council subscribes to the Chartered Institute of Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Finance Advisory Network and officers regularly attend these network events, enabling them to prepare for changes to accounting requirements.	

## The risk management framework

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
27	How does the council assess risks to ensure services are not disrupted?	<p>Risk management is important to the successful delivery of the council's objectives. It identifies and assesses risks, decides on appropriate responses, and provides assurance that the chosen responses are effective.</p> <p>The overall responsibility for effective risk management in the council lies with the Chief Executive, supported by the Senior Management Team. The council uses a standard risk management methodology which encompasses the identification, analysis, prioritisation, management and monitoring of risks in a corporate risk register.</p> <p>Councillors are made aware of how these risks are being managed through reports to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee. The council employs a risk and insurance officer to implement the risk management strategy.</p>	To conduct a review of the risk management strategy and supporting framework beyond 2023/24.
28	How does management monitor risks?	Risk champions have been identified for each service area, and operational risk registers are in place for these and all heads of service are responsible for ensuring that risks are identified and prioritised and	Line managers to ensure risk is considered as part of all officer activities

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
		<p>entered onto the risk register. A monthly meeting reviews the operational risk registers and 'horizon scans' future risks.</p> <p>The risk reporting framework in place is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly reporting from project groups, service areas, third party contractors and corporate risks to the Risk Forum.</li> <li>• Quarterly reporting to the programmes and assurance team.</li> <li>• Quarterly reporting as and when required to Cabinet, Strategic Management Team, and the Operational Management Group.</li> <li>• Half yearly reporting to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee.</li> </ul> <p>All line managers are responsible for implementing strategies at team level through adequate communication, training and the assessment and monitoring of risks. All officers must consider risk as part of everyday activities and provide input to the risk management process.</p>	
29	Does the council have any business continuity arrangements?	<p>The council has business continuity management arrangements in place to ensure continuation of priority services in the event of an unforeseen disruption, as was employed for example during the recent Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Formal council meetings are continuing in a hybrid format to increase accessibility, which has increased since the pandemic due to remote viewing. Considering the temporary legislation to hold virtual council meetings was removed, formal decision making occurs in person with a live stream onto <a href="#">Youtube</a>.</p>	To ensure business continuity arrangements continue to be regularly reviewed. Review of the Business continuity strategy.
30	Do officer reports to council meetings advise on risk?	Risk management has been incorporated into officer reports to Council, Cabinet and committee meetings, where officers are required to detail the risks and implications that the council faces in making its decision.	Report writing training / refresh on requirements

## The management development framework

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 202223	Actions
31	How does the council help new councillors in their roles?	<p>Councillors are offered a comprehensive induction programme after their election. This includes a welcome event, a councillor’s guide, a briefing on essential issues affecting the council, and targeted training sessions on planning and licensing law, and effective scrutiny. There will be a further assessment of ongoing training needs. Members of the Joint Audit and Governance Committee also had a training programme.</p> <p>Councillors are allocated a buddy – an experienced officer who can answer questions or signpost new members to the right place.</p>	<p>To continue to implement the councillors’ induction programme and to induct any councillors elected at a by-election.</p> <p>Review and planning of induction programme and updates to the councillor induction handbook and accessibility of information given priority.</p>
32	Does the council have an audit committee?	<p>The council has a Joint Audit and Governance Committee (JAGC) with South Oxfordshire District Council. The purpose of the joint committee is to ensure a consistent approach, avoid duplication of resources and improve joint working between both councils. The Joint Audit and Governance Committee undertakes the core functions of an audit committee, as set out in CIPFA’s Audit Committees – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police (2022).</p> <p>The committee has a <a href="#">work programme</a> to keep track of workstreams for the year ahead.</p> <p>Each council continues to have an individual audit and governance sub-committee to agree procedures for handling individual code of conduct complaints against district, town and parish councillors.</p>	<p>To continue to ensure that the Joint Audit and Governance Committee membership is trained appropriately.</p> <p>Review of committee’s operation as per CIPFA guidance update.</p>

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
33	Does the council have a scrutiny function?	<p>The council has a Joint Scrutiny Committee with South Oxfordshire District Council to consider matters affecting both councils, and a separate Scrutiny Committee to consider its own matters. The scrutiny committees continue to help develop council policy. They also review performance in meeting council objectives, and the council's own Scrutiny Committee holds Cabinet to account for its decisions.</p> <p>The scrutiny committees can set up task and finish groups to continue the work of scrutiny between meetings by investigating issues and suggest improvements.</p> <p><a href="#">Scrutiny meetings</a> <a href="#">Joint scrutiny meetings</a></p>	To continue to ensure that the Joint Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Committee members are trained appropriately.
34	Does the council have a management training programme?	<p>The development opportunities for senior officers includes support towards a nationally recognised qualification. They can also attend other strategic leadership programmes. Attendees evaluate these programmes, provide feedback and line managers review training as part of the development and performance review and the formal one to one process.</p> <p>Where identified executive coaching and mentoring is made available to senior managers.</p>	To continue the management development training programme in 2023/24 to consolidate management development through refresher and follow-up sessions.

## Internal Audit

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
35	How does the council audit its functions?	Internal Audit is the council's independent assurance function that provides an objective assessment on the effectiveness of the council's services. It assists the council by evaluating the adequacy of governance, risk management, internal controls and use of resources through its planned audit work and recommends improvements where necessary.	Continuation of the internal audit programme for 2022-23

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
		<p>It may also undertake consulting services at the request of the councils, subject to there being no impact on the core assurance work and the availability of skills and resources.</p> <p>Significant weaknesses identified in governance, risk management and internal controls will be communicated to the appropriate level of management through an audit report, and advice issued on how particular problems may be resolved and control strengthened to minimise the level of risk to an acceptable level. Senior Management Team has a standing agenda item to deal with any limited assurance reports at the earliest possible opportunity.</p> <p>Internal Audit provides assurance that it has complied with the relevant Internal Audit Standard setters. These include the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, which came into effect on 1 April 2013. From 1 April 2017 these standards encompassed the mandatory elements of the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors' International Professional Practices Framework.</p>	
36	Does the council pro-actively combat fraud?	<p>The primary responsibility for the prevention and detection of fraud lies with management, who are also responsible for managing the risk of fraud, bribery and corruption. The internal audit team are responsible for remaining alert to the possibility of fraud, including intentional wrongdoing, errors and omissions, poor value for money, failure to comply with management policy and conflicts of interest when performing their individual audits.</p> <p>Auditors are responsible for having sufficient knowledge to identify indicators that fraud or corruption may have been committed. The risk of fraud is formally considered in every audit and where necessary, the effectiveness of controls to prevent/detect fraud are tested.</p> <p>The profile of the <a href="#">anti-fraud, bribery and corruption policy</a> and the <a href="#">joint whistleblowing policy</a> have been raised by increased visibility, resulting from inclusion on the council's website.</p>	Continue to remain alert to the possibility of fraud when performing individual audits.



Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
		<p>The council actively participates in the national anti-fraud initiative, publicises successful cases against fraud, and shares intelligence with relevant partner organisations such as the Police, the Department for Work and Pensions, and the National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN). The council prosecutes those committed of fraud. It undertakes active recovery of fraudulent overpayments and ensures policies are applied consistently.</p> <p>The internal control arrangements include the council's Constitution, the provision of an internal audit service, reports to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee when necessary, transparent governance reporting through an assurance framework, and compliance with relevant laws and regulations.</p> <p>The council has an <a href="#">anti-money laundering policy</a> and procedure and has designated the Section 151 Officer to be the council's anti-money laundering reporting officer. <a href="#">Anti-fraud and corruption response plan</a></p> <p>While the risk of money laundering to the council remains low, the council remains vigilant. The council has in place an anti-fraud, bribery and corruption policy and a whistleblowing policy.</p>	

## External sources of assurance

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
37	How does the council respond to issues raised by its external auditor?	<p>Issues raised by the council's external auditor, and other external inspectors are used to identify improvement areas in the council's governance arrangements. EY was appointed as the council's external auditor by the Public Sector Audit Appointments to continue to act as external auditors to Vale of White Horse District Council from 2018/19.</p> <p>During 2021/22 the council opted into the Public Sector Audit Appointments framework for the audits from 2023/24 onwards.</p>	

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
		<p>Any issues raised by the council's external auditor are reported to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee. The committee ensures the actions are taken by instructing Senior Management Team accordingly.</p> <p>The Local Government Ombudsman provides a summary of information on complaints about the council to enable it to incorporate any feedback into service improvement. These are reported to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee annually. The Senior Management Team has used the ombudsman's feedback to review service provision.</p>	

## Current governance issues

Ref.	Governance issue	Controls in 2022/23	Actions
38	How does the council monitor its contract under the Five Councils Partnership?	<p>The council has a contract for some of its corporate services with a contractor, through the Five Councils Partnership with Hart District Council, Havant Borough Council, the former Mendip District Council, and South Oxfordshire District Council. The council entered into an inter-authority agreement with the other partner councils to cover the procurement and the governance of the future partnership. In addition, a joint client team and a joint committee oversee the delivery of the contract. The Joint Scrutiny Committee with South Oxfordshire District Council undertakes the scrutiny role.</p> <p>The contract is also monitored by a joint committee of members from all of the participating councils; by officers representing the councils on a Joint Tactical Board, and by chief executives on a Senior Management Board.</p>	To keep the corporate services contract under review in 2023/24, taking any opportunities for commercial or operational improvement.
39	Does the council monitor the effectiveness of individual projects?	Following a series of programme governance reviews in 2018/19, the council reviewed and updated its project management framework.	To continue to monitor the effectiveness of projects in 2023/24.

## Conclusion

14. The council proposes over the coming year to take steps to address the actions above. These will further enhance governance arrangements. We, the undersigned, 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.

Signature		Date	
	Mark Stone, Chief Executive		
Signature		Date	
	Councillor Bethia Thomas, Leader of the Council		

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