

AUDIT COMMITTEE

Annual Governance Statement Action Plan

20 March 2024

Report of Monitoring Officer

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Members with an update on the Action Plan referred to in the AGS in connection with other governance issues identified.

This report is public

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) **That the progress and steps yet to be taken on the Action Plan be noted.**

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In November 2023 the Audit Committee received a report on progress and steps taken on the Annual Governance Statement (AGS)'s Action Plan with regards to 'other governance' issues identified in the July 2023 ASG. As Members will be aware the Council issued its AGS following the Audit Committee's consideration of the document on 26th July 2023. The AGS identified various issues to be addressed. These are split into two categories – (a) Other Governance Issues and (b) Significant Challenges for 2022/23 and beyond. This report provides an update on the first category. That is the issues identified as "Other Governance Issues".
- 1.2 As set out in the AGS, an Action Plan has been put together to address the areas identified. The issues covered by the Action Plan include:
- (a) Policy review/updating
 - (b) The Corporate Complaints Policy and other service complaint procedures
 - (c) Publication of Information
 - (d) Information on the Council's website
 - (e) Better Publication of Officer roles
 - (f) Review of Festival Market Management

- 1.3 In November 2023 the Audit Committee was informed that actions under (c) and (e) have been completed. This report details with the remaining actions.
- 1.4 Good progress is being made against the Action Plan. Although, more work is yet to be done.

Work undertaken/to be completed

Policy Review / Updating

- 1.5 As previously reported many policies lacked sufficient audit trail of review and amendment. This creates weakness in ensuring that policies are kept up-to-date and are kept properly under review.
- 1.6 A central list of Council Policies has been created from looking at LCC's website and intranet. Managers were contacted in August 2023 and asked to supply the following for each policy:
 - a. date of creation,
 - b. date of review and
 - c. details of the decision maker.
- 1.7 Updates were requested by the end of November 2023 and this has resulted in further policies being updated. Previously there were 114 policies on the list. Further policies have been added bringing the total to 149. Work is underway within individual services to bring the policies up to date. Further reminders were issued to policy owners on 4th March 2024, requesting updates by 3rd May 2024.

Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure

- 1.8 Council Housing had a published complaints process policy that did not refer to in the Corporate Complaints Policy.
- 1.9 A large consultation has recently taken place around complaints that are dealt with by both the housing and general ombudsman. This was completed in November 2023. The Council's central complaints policy and process has been reviewed and amended. The amended policy and process was sent to the Council's Senior Leadership Team in January 2024 for comment. Following this the Council has now adopted a new central policy and procedure for complaints and training to staff is currently being rolled out.

Information on Website

- 1.10 As previously reported, it has been noted that Information is sometimes difficult to find on the Council's website. This is a vague observation in the Minor Governance Issues Action Plan and has therefore been difficult to make specific improvements.
- 1.11 The Council's Communication Team continue to investigate replacing the technology/system which underpins the website. When this is done the content could also be reviewed. There are no timescales set for this work currently.

Review of Festival Market Management

- 1.12 Again, as previously reported, following a matter raised under the Raising Concerns Policy the Monitoring Officer has requested that a review of the festival market trading practices be undertaken by the Chief Officer Sustainable Growth to ensure suitable financial management has been, and is being, undertaken.
- 1.13 Unfortunately, this work has been delayed due to staffing issues. However, the review is now mid-way through and is due to conclude during Q1 24-25.

2.0 Conclusion

- 2.1 Audit Committee members are asked to note the progress and work yet to be done under the Action Plan on the other governance issues identified in the AGS.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT (including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing):
--

The Council must keep its governance processes under review and must ensure that it take steps to ensure that its processes are kept up-date and relevant. Good governance ensures that resources are properly used for the community it serves. Implementing the action plan on other governance issues helps ensure the Council's good governance.
--

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.
--

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No direct financial implications arising from this report.
--

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources, Information Services, Property, Open Spaces
--

No direct resource implications arising from this report.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The S151 officer has seen this report and has no further comments.
--

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Deputy Monitoring Officer has helped draft this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS	Contact Officers: Monitoring Officer
--------------------------	---

Annual Government Statement – July 2023	Email: lgorst@lancaster.gov.uk
---	--

	Ref: N/A
--	-----------------