

AUDIT COMMITTEE

Annual Governance Statement Action Plan 22nd November 2023

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 July 2023 the Council issued its Annual Governance Statement (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 deals with 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 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

- 1.4 Unfortunately, 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.
- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 Updates were requested by the end of November, so further reminders can be issued in December, with reminders being scheduled to be issued every 4 months. Limited responses have been received so far, with the majority of policies (85 of 114) listed as remaining overdue according to their review frequency and last review date.

Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure

- 1.7 Council Housing have a published complaints process policy that is not referred to in the Corporate Complaints Policy.
- 1.8 The central complaints policy and process has been reviewed. There is currently a large consultation taking place around complaints that is both the housing and general ombudsman. Therefore, it makes sense to wait for the outcome of this consultation, which closes at the end of November, before making further amendments to the policy.

Publication of Information

- 1.9 It has been noted that not all information has been published in accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015. This is a matter that officers have been working on.
- 1.10 Further has since been published on the Council's website in compliance with the Code ([Local government transparency code - Lancaster City Council](#)). This action has now been marked as complete and closed.

Information on Website

- 1.11 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.
- 1.12 The Council's Communication Team are looking 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.

Better Publication of Officer roles

- 1.13 It has previously been difficult to identify key officers on the Council's website and intranet. For example, posts such as the Council's anti-money laundering officer, Internal auditors.
- 1.14 The Chief Officers and Statutory Officers are all listed on the Council's website. In October 2023, the page <https://www.lancaster.gov.uk/the-council-and-democracy/about-the-council/council-structure> was updated to add in further information on posts.
- 1.15 This action has now been marked as complete and closed.

Review of Festival Market Management

- 1.16 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.
- 1.17 Unfortunately, this work has been delayed due to staffing issues. This is being resolved presently and work will commence once there is sufficient staffing resource in place.

Conclusion

- 1.18 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

Annual Government Statement – July 2023

Contact Officers: Monitoring Officer

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Ref: N/A