

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE SERVICE PLAN 2005 – 2008

Service Departments:-	Services Provided :-	Challenges and opportunities:-
<p>Corporate Governance provides the following services to the Council:-</p>		
<p>1. Benefit Fraud</p>	<p>Investigates possible cases of fraudulent claims for housing and council tax benefit bringing prosecutions or applying other sanctions as appropriate. Prosecutions are handled in-house with counsel being used for crown court hearings.</p>	<p>Negotiations are currently in progress for the provision of this service in partnership with another authority. If this comes to fruition the maintenance of the level of subsidy will be challenging. If the discussions do not lead to a partnership then the department will need to be rebuilt following staff departures.</p>
<p>2. Democratic Services</p>	<p>Provides support for the Council and its Committees. The service prepares agendas, minutes and reports and follows up on actions. It undertakes Member support and training and is responsible for electoral registration and holding elections.</p>	<p>A formal review of the Council's democratic structure is currently being undertaken. Should the Council decide to move towards area committees there will be severe resource implications. County elections are to be held in 2005 and a general election will be held in 2005/6. There is also a proposed government project for a co-ordinated on-line register of electors.</p>
<p>3. Emergency Planning</p>	<p>Ensures that the Council is able to meet its statutory requirements to respond to emergency situations.</p>	<p>The Civil Contingency Bill is likely to become law in March 2005. The Council will be required to conduct a fundamental review of its emergency procedures and to carry out exercises in emergency response on a planned basis. The Council will also be required to carry out risk assessments to gauge the risk of an emergency occurring, the risk of an emergency requiring a</p>

4. Internal Audit	This function is supplied in partnership with Stevenage Borough Council. The partnership carries out audits of internal services, gives audit related advice and consultancy and carries out forensic analysis of irregularity and fraud.	sustained response and to have in place plans to ensure normal service delivery. There may be opportunities to expand the partnership to include other authorities to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Unplanned work and special inquiries can distract the service from its objectives.
5. Legal Services	Legal Services provide legal support for the Council, its Committees and its various services in the form of legal advice, representation in court proceedings, conveyancing and legal drafting.	Legal services is seeking to achieve Lexcel accreditation to demonstrate excellence in service delivery. If the partnership for benefit fraud becomes permanent there is a risk of losing that area of legal work at increased cost to the Council. Changes in legislation (referred to below) will provide challenges for the service.
6. Licensing	Currently administers private hire and hackney carriage licences, public entertainment licences and fulfills other licensing functions.	The Licensing Act 2003 becomes partially effective in February 2005 and is likely to be fully in force by November 2005. This will impose strains on the service and additional resources may be required to fulfill the statutory functions. Further proposed changes in legislation (relating to charitable collections and gambling) will impose additional strains. The expansion of Stansted Airport increases demand for private hire licences in particular.
7. Local Land Charges	Maintains the register of local land charges and processes searches and requests for information.	
8. Monitoring Officer	The Executive Manager Corporate Governance fulfills the	Regulations now permit an Ethical Standards Officer

	<p>statutory role of the Council's Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>appointed by the Standards Board to refer complains of breaches of the Councillor's Code of Conduct (both at district and town or parish level) to the Standards Committee. Further regulations to be laid shortly will permit reference of allegations to the Monitoring Officer for local investigation. Depending on the level of references this may have resource implications.</p>
<p>Key Aims and Objectives</p>	<p>The key aim is excellence. Our people have to be equipped to deliver it, our customers have to experience it, the community has to benefit from it and to achieve it we must communicate.</p> <p>All elements of Corporate Governance are committed to providing excellent services. Members of the teams are appropriately trained to enable them to fulfill their roles and to take on new tasks. Some services have primarily an internal client base (benefit fraud, democratic services, internal audit and legal services). Others are more outwardly focused (emergency planning, licensing and local land charges). The Monitoring Officer has both internal and external clients (Town and Parish Councils). In each case challenging locally adopted performance indicators ensure high quality service delivery and interaction with clients is seen as a key feature of service delivery. Internally focused services support client departments in providing community leadership. Outwardly focused services</p>	<p>Date</p>

<p>2005 to 2006</p>	<p>support the community by establishing emergency plans, regulating licenced activities and providing an efficient local land charge service to enable rapid progress of property transactions.</p> <p>All services communicate not only with each other but also with service users by way of regular meetings. Key objectives for the period 2005 – 2008 follow.</p> <p>Benefit fraud will either move forward in partnership or be re-established within the Council.</p> <p>Democratic Services will prepare for and administer the County Council Elections</p> <p>Democratic Services will assess the value of targeted canvassing.</p> <p>Emergency Planning will prepare for the implementation of the Civil Contingencies Bill to enable the Council to deliver its obligations once the Bill becomes law (expected March 2005)</p> <p>Internal audit will explore how the profile of audit related governance issues can be raised by adopting the features of an audit committee.</p> <p>Legal Services will demonstrate excellence in service delivery by preparing for Lexcel accreditation.</p> <p>Legal Services and Licensing will prepare for the implementation of the Licensing Act 2003 both during the transitional period and thereafter.</p>	<p>Continuing.</p> <p>May 2005</p> <p>December 2005</p> <p>March 2006</p> <p>March 2006</p> <p>October 2005</p> <p>February 2005/ November 2005</p>
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2006 to 2007	Local Land Charges will move towards full electronic search delivery.	June 2005
	The Monitoring Officer will ensure that arrangements are in place to enable local investigations of complaints.	When regulations are made and effective.
	Democratic Services will will prepare for and administer the General Election.	June 2006
	Emergency Planning will devise and test plans for business continuity in the event of a disaster.	March 2007
	Internal Audit will investigate the expansion of the Audit Partnership to include one or more other authorities.	March 2007
	Legal Services will achieve Lexcel accreditation	May 2006
	Legal Services and Licensing will prepare for the implementation of the Gambling Bill when the same becomes law	March 2007
2007 to 2008	Local Land Charges will endeavour to achieve 95% of standard local searches completed within 6 working days (national standard of 100% within 10 working days currently being met).	March 2007
	Democratic Services will prepare for and administer the UDC district, town and parish elections	May 2008
	Emergency planning will prepare and validate plans to deal with a mass evacuation	March 2008
	Internal audit will explore the viability of further expansion of	March 2008

	the Audit Partnership Legal Services will prepare any legal agreements required in connection with the expansion of Stansted Airport.	March 2008
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Appendix A : Current Staff Resources

Executive Manager Corporate Governance	Michael Perry
Benefit Fraud	
Investigating Officer	Paul Woolcott
Investigating Officer	Vacant
Administration Officer (Part time 25 hours)	Vacant
Democratic Services	
Democratic Services Manager	Mick Purkiss
Committee Officer (Part time 18.5 hours)	Maggie Cox
Committee Officer (Part time 30 hours)	Catherine Roberts
Committee Officer	Victoria Borges
Electoral Services Officer	Peter Snow
Committee and Electoral Services Assistant	Linda Bunting
Members Assistant	Jane Mackie
Emergency Planning	
Emergency Planning Officer	Sarah Baker
Internal Audit	
Audit Manager	Simon Martin
Internal Auditor	Glenn Bayford
Internal Auditor	Sheila Bronson
Internal Auditor	Jonathan Smith
Legal Services and Local Land Charges	
Solicitor (Non-contentious)	Catherine Nicholson
Solicitor (Litigation and Planning)	Christine Oliva
Local Land Charges/Legal Officer	Val Rogacs
Legal Assistant	Jo Hayden
Clerical/Junior Legal Assistant	Sarah Pawsey
Licensing	
Licensing Enforcement Officer	Murray Hardy
Licensing Officer	Amanda Turner
Administration Assistant (Part time 30 hours)	Joanne Jones

The Civil Contingency Bill will impose strains on the Emergency Planning Officer and it is likely that either an additional staff resource or outside consultancy assistance will need to be brought in to assist with business continuity planning. The estimated cost is £15000.

External support may also be necessary to comply with the District Auditor's report on the Council's risk management strategy. The estimated cost is again £15000, and will be funded by virement of existing budgets in the current year.

Legal Services will be stretched by the Licensing Act 2003 and (when it becomes law) the Gambling Act. An additional resource will to be required within the next three years to deal with these challenges. It is considered that a trainee solicitor would be able to

provide the additional support required. The estimated cost of a trainee solicitor would be £19200 - £24000

Licensing will be also be stretched by the above referred to Acts. Whilst current staff levels should be able to cope with administration of licensing there is no capacity for enforcement work. Further hackney carriage and private hire operators have indicated that they would prefer the Council to take a more proactive role in enforcement. There are insufficient resources to do this at present. Ideally the service should appoint an enforcement officer. The Licensing Act will generate an income for the Council but there are no figures available at present. It is also intended to explore whether the hackney and private hire trade would be prepared to contribute to the costs of enforcement by way of an increase in fees.

The Monitoring Officers role is unfunded. The Corporate Manger Human Resources is the Deputy Monitoring Officer. When allegations of a breach of the Code of Conduct are referred for local investigation resources will be required to enable the investigations to be carried out. The proposed post of Trainee Solicitor would provide support in this connection.

Appendix B: Annual Work Programme

- Benefit fraud will improve working relations with the Benefits Section by way of meetings, joint training exercises and giving feedback to improve upon referrals.
- Democratic Services will:-
 - Continue to service all council and committee meetings to timetable
 - Deliver development programmes for Members
 - Make diversion, tree preservation and street closure orders
 - Deal with ombudsman complaints
 - Maintain the Council's Data Protection Act registration
 - Maintain an accurate Register of Electors
 - Administer all elections held in the District
- Emergency Planning will:-
 - Prepare for the implementation of the Civil Contingencies Bill
 - Carry out a review of the Council's Emergency Procedures Manual
- Internal Audit will:-
 - Agree and complete audit plans and report back the findings
 - Raise the profile of audit related corporate governance issues
 - Encourage other authorities to consider joining the partnership
- Legal Services will:-
 - Train relevant staff on new legislation and procedures
 - Train Members and staff in licensing
 - Review project work to assess the impact on service delivery
 - Work towards Lexcel accreditation
- Licensing will:-
 - Continue to administer hackney carriage and private hire licenses and charity collections
 - Implement the Licensing Act 2003
- Local Land Charges will:-
 - Continue to deliver 100% of standard searches within 10 working days
 - Continue to deliver 90% of standard searches within 6 working days
 - Review and update service level agreements with client departments
 - Hold an open day for customers
 - Pursue NLIS level 3 search delivery
- The Monitoring Officer will support Members of the Standards Committee in dealing with local determinations and arrange for local investigations of allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct as required.

Appendix C: Hard to Reach Groups

Corporate Governance does not discriminate against any person in provision of services or recruitment on grounds of race, ethnic origin, disability, gender, gender orientation, religion, age or any other grounds.

The service will make reasonable adaptations where necessary to assist in the provision of services or recruitment of people with disabilities including (but not limited to) the provision of large print, Braille translations or tape-recorded document for those with visual impairment. Democratic Services offer to provide a signer for meetings for those who are deaf or have impaired hearing. Democratic Services also promote postal voting for those unable to attend polling stations and monitor polling stations to ensure they are suitable for use by those with disabilities.

When undertaking court proceedings where it is known that the other party has special needs Legal Services ensure that the court is aware of those needs and can make suitable provision for those needs to be met (e.g. transfer of cases to a court with wheelchair access).

Where the service becomes aware of dealing with a person whose first language is not English it will arrange for all correspondence and documents to be translated if required.

Appendix D: Risk Management

1. All of the teams are staffed to minimum levels. Absences (due to ill-health, holidays, pending filling a vacancy etc) can therefore severely impact upon service delivery. Many of the positions are specialist and backfilling can be difficult. Cross department working is being encouraged to try and combat this.
2. A computer malfunction at the time of an election would prejudice the service's ability to manage the election. Procedures are in place to enable an election to be run without the use of computers but delivery of other non-statutory services would be hindered during that period.
3. It is not possible to gauge the amount of work which will be generated by the Licensing Act 2003 between the first and second appointed days (the transitional period) and officers have no means of controlling the volume of work as the timing of applications is in the hands of the potential applicants. Short term additional resources may be required.