

This action plan has been developed following the completion of the [independent governance review](#) by David Bowles during 2020, which was discussed at the Standards Committee meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020. The review identified both a ‘consistent pattern of threatening and intimidatory behaviour’ and ‘a lack of respect for the proper boundaries between members and officers and distortion of the proper decision-making process’.

Many of the weaknesses in corporate governance described in David Bowles’ review were already known to the Council, and the Leader and Chief Executive had already commenced an extensive programme of work to address these issues in the last couple of years. The [initial organisational response](#) to his review sets out the progress that has been made to date.

The Standards Committee has subsequently invited the Chief Executive to prepare this more detailed action plan, which lists the recommendations from David Bowles’ report along with the actions to be taken to address them.

The completion of this action plan will be monitored and overseen by the Council’s Corporate Governance Board, who report to the Chief Executive. The purpose of this action plan will be to ensure that the necessary improvements in governance become embedded within the organisation and do not represent a one-off change but ensure a lasting continuous improvement in governance with a permanent positive change on the Council going forward.

Progress made against these actions will be reported publicly in:

1. The Annual Governance Statement 2020-21
2. A follow-up report to Standards Committee in December 2021

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Response / actions to be taken</b>	<b>Responsible person</b>	<b>Deadline for completion</b>
<p><b>Recommendation 1: Values statement</b>  <i>The Leader and Chief Executive should consult upon and publish a brief statement of the values of the organisation perhaps focusing on behaviours and transparency and measure their actions and those of others against those values. Those values should promote individual personal responsibility for challenging improper and unacceptable behaviours.</i></p>	<p>The current Corporate Strategy (approved by full Council in September 2020 to cover the period up until 2024) includes the following values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility for our actions</li> <li>• Fairness and integrity in all we do</li> <li>• Responding to the needs of our community based on evidence</li> <li>• Respect and support for each other and our residents</li> </ul>	Chief Executive	March 2021

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Considering the future wellbeing of our area over short term expediency</li> </ul> <p>A staff working group has been set up in December 2020 to review these values and consider how values can be embedded into the organisational culture, including through performance management and the work of the Culture Change Champions.</p>		
	<p>The Organisational Development team is also taking the opportunity to review the staff competency framework and ensure that it aligns with the values above and drives the right behaviours for the future.</p>	<p>Head of Organisational Development</p>	<p>March 2021</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2: Political conventions</b>  <i>To underpin an ethical culture the Council should consider whether to review and then formalise these types of arrangements and document them as ‘political conventions’ and enshrine them in the Constitution. Group Leaders need to work together to consider how their actions can help promote or hinder an ethical culture and should consider external support to help embed a healthy political culture.</i></p>	<p>David Bowles notes in his report that ‘the value of effective Group Leaders’ meetings in particular should not be underestimated. They can help reduce tension and can be a way of briefing and obtaining wider input from members on confidential or sensitive matters.’</p> <p>With this in mind, the Group Leaders will be encouraged to meet regularly, and will be supported by Democratic Services and the Monitoring Officer if they wish to enshrine political conventions within the Constitution.</p>	<p>Group Leaders</p>	<p>December 2021</p>
	<p>A joint working protocol will be prepared that will define regular informal Group Leader meetings, in order to enhance cross-party working and encourage communication on matters such as Council meetings and governance issues.</p>	<p>Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>July 2021</p>

<p><b>Recommendation 3: Strengthening the officer culture</b></p> <p><i>While recognising the democratic legitimacy of elected members the Chief Executive needs to work with staff and members to re-establish appropriate roles and change an officer culture which had become overly compliant, to one which supports an ethical culture and where officers and members can talk frankly to each other.</i></p>	<p>In addition to the actions specified for Recommendation 1 which will also address this Recommendation, the following actions will be taken:</p>		
	<p>The adoption of a new Constitution, which takes effect on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021, will be accompanied by workshops and training sessions for officers to help embed the Member/Officer Relations Protocol.</p>	<p>Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>March 2021</p>
	<p>In order to reinforce the different roles of officers and councillors, a new process has been put in place to ensure Executive Board have oversight of the reports being written and (when the report has been requested by a member of Cabinet) approve the spending of officer time on writing that report. This is becoming embedded via targeted training sessions for officers and by increased visibility of the Forward Plan. This process will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that it is fulfilling its purpose.</p>	<p>Section 151 Officer / Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
	<p>A full training programme will be developed for both Members and officers, consisting of a series of modules that require completion. This will be a continual rolling programme of development with mandatory elements which need to be completed and evidenced through learning logs (officers) and Democratic Services monitoring (Members).</p> <p>The Member development programme will include mandatory, recommended and optional elements to ensure that all Members have an awareness and understanding of Council functions and associated governance.</p>	<p>Head of Organisational Development</p>	<p>March 2021</p>

	A programme of CEO-led Council-wide events will be agreed to focus on leadership and culture within the organisation. The rolling programme of leadership events will commence from Q1 2021-22.	Chief Executive / Head of Organisational Development	June 2021
<p><b>Recommendation 4: Re-establish proper decision taking</b></p> <p><i>The review of the Constitution will provide an opportunity to formally document proper decision taking whether that be by officers, Portfolio Holders, Cabinet or the Council itself. That should be supported by intensive work not just with members but also with officers who may have lost sight of proper process. This should be externally facilitated.</i></p>	The updated Constitution, which was approved at full Council in November 2020, is a more modern, streamlined document that should be far easier to understand and put into practice. The revised Constitution is due to take effect from 4 <sup>th</sup> January 2021 and its introduction will be supported by workshops and training sessions, as we recognise this as an ideal opportunity to strengthen both officers' and councillors' understanding.	Monitoring Officer	March 2021
	New resources have been designed and implemented during summer 2020 to improve officers' understanding of the decision making process, including a flowchart, detailed procedure notes and refreshed report template – in particular, taking the opportunity to clarify and formalise aspects of the process to ensure that Executive Board have earlier oversight of the reports that are being written and decisions that are being recommended. All officers taking reports through the decision-making process must now also consult with the Finance and Legal teams prior to the final review by the Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer before the report proceeds to Cabinet or full Council. Targeted training sessions were held in November 2020 to develop officers' understanding of report writing in the context of the clarified procedures. A survey circulated after the training sessions showed that, so far, 100% of respondents felt	Section 151 Officer / Monitoring Officer	Ongoing

	<p>that their understanding of the decision making process had been improved by attending the session. This process and resources will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that they are fulfilling their purpose. Refresher training sessions on the process will be held in Q1 2021-22 with consideration of additional 'bitesize' training to improve officer understanding.</p>		
	<p>Training for Members will be developed to cover the roles and responsibilities of officers and councillors, the role of scrutiny and best practice for decision making. This will be mandatory for all councillors, both new and long-standing.</p>	<p>Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>August 2021</p>

<p><b>Recommendation 5: Transparency in decision taking</b></p> <p><b>a) Forward Plan</b></p> <p><i>The Council has a Forward Plan: the original statutory basis for the publication of a Forward Plan was transparency. Forward Plans may not be the most exciting of publications but in addition to enhancing transparency, used properly they can aid early discussion between members and officers of significant issues. Before an item gets onto the Forward Plan the proper processes for taking the decision should be agreed. A more robust Forward Plan will allow Scrutiny to better understand issues which will be coming forward, assist in prioritising work and smooth the political management of the Council. It should be updated regularly, preferably via discussion with Cabinet and published prominently on the Council's website. It should be a living working document. The title of the agenda items and other information provided in the Plan should be sufficient to enable members and the public to understand the issues coming forward.</i></p>	<p>During summer 2020 we have introduced a new internal Forward Plan to allow senior officers to track which reports have been commissioned and when they are scheduled to go to EB, Cabinet Briefing, Cabinet, and full Council. This has been shared with Heads of Service to encourage transparency and enable more efficient planning of decision making, and is discussed at Executive Board meetings every week to ensure they have oversight of the decisions that are making their way through the process. The new procedure for taking a report through the decision making process specifies that information such as who the decision maker is, whether the item is a Key Decision and who the Portfolio Holder is must now be agreed at the time that an item is added to the Forward Plan, as well as the importance of a clear and comprehensive title. This has been emphasised in targeted training for officers. Democratic Services are currently undergoing a service review to ensure that they are a multi-skilled team able to support the democratic process, and similar improvements to the external published Forward Plan are to follow when the new team structure is in place and fully recruited to.</p>	<p>Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>March 2021</p>
	<p>The Forward Plan will be reviewed at each Cabinet meeting to ensure it captures all upcoming items and that Cabinet are fully aware of the programme of work coming forward.</p>	<p>Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
	<p>The Communications team will consider how best to promote the Forward Plan on the website (currently found within the Democratic section) to make it more visible.</p>	<p>Head of Organisational Development</p>	<p>March 2021</p>

<p><b>Recommendation 5: Transparency in decision taking</b></p> <p><b>b) Planning</b></p> <p><i>Post Covid, the Council should, as a minimum, record meetings of its Planning Committee and make those readily available to the public.</i></p>	<p>As a result of the Council’s shift to digital committee meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic, all committee meetings (with the exception of exempt sessions) are currently being recorded and archived on the Council’s website. It is yet to be decided by central government whether the legislation introduced to allow virtual Council meetings will be extended beyond the Covid-19 emergency period, but having seen the increased engagement with residents as a result, the Council is committed to maintaining the recording of committee meetings even if these are no longer streamed live.</p>	<p>Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 5: Transparency in decision taking</b></p> <p><b>c) Wider member briefings</b></p> <p><i>The Council should review how confidential information on key developments or from external bodies, such as those dealing with Whitehill and Bordon, is shared within the Council (perhaps via Group Leaders meetings) and how items which are not confidential can be made more widely available.</i></p>	<p>Future Member Briefings will be timetabled for six months in advance and publicised to Members.</p>	<p>Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
	<p>The new governance arrangements for Whitehill &amp; Bordon will be shared with Members through a Member Briefing early in 2021.</p>	<p>Head of Regeneration</p>	<p>March 2021</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 6: Compromise agreements</b></p> <p><i>The Council should review the wording used in any compromise agreements to ensure that they positively state that any confidentiality clauses do not ‘gag’ employees from raising legitimate concerns about governance within the Council, whether covered by ‘public interest’ or not.</i></p>	<p>The Organisational Development team are currently reviewing the exit process and will incorporate guidance to this effect in their written policies and procedures. The advice of the Monitoring Officer will be sought in the case of any future compromise agreement.</p> <p>Compromise/settlement agreements will only be used in accordance with HR policies and to follow sector best practice guidelines.</p>	<p>Monitoring Officer / Head of Organisational Development</p>	<p>March 2021</p>

<p><b>Recommendation 7: Scrutiny</b>  <i>The Council should consider how it can further develop and strengthen Scrutiny to ensure it is relevant and focused, including through reviewing whether there can be some dedicated officer resources devoted to it. It should also consider whether there is scope for improving the function by some co-ordination with Havant.</i></p>	<p>Democratic Services are currently undergoing a service review to form a shared, multi-skilled team that is able to support the democratic process both at East Hants and Havant. A shared team with aligned processes will result in improved efficiency and improved resilience and this should enable the development of the scrutiny function at both Councils. The rollout of the new Constitutions at both Councils will provide a coordinated and broadly similar structure of scrutiny and oversight committees.</p>	Monitoring Officer	August 2021
	<p>Mandatory training will be introduced for members of the Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee to ensure the role of the Committee is clear.</p>	Monitoring Officer	March 2021
<p><b>Recommendation 8: Standards Committee</b>  <i>Officers and Members need to commit to using the Standards Committee for its stated purpose and the Council acknowledge that the joint failure to act in a timely manner in the past has exacerbated problems.</i></p>	<p>The Council has been working to improve understanding of the role of the Standards Committee since its re-establishment in summer 2019. The independent governance report has provided an opportunity for improved visibility of the Standards Committee and the strengthened role of the Monitoring Officer has already begun to have an effect, with several cases already having been referred to the Standards Committee for investigation in October 2020 (all of which were resolved informally).</p>	Monitoring Officer / Group Leaders	Ongoing
	<p>Training on the structure and role of committees, including Standards Committee, is currently being developed for officers and will be incorporated into the introduction of the new Constitution.</p>	Monitoring Officer / Head of Organisational Development	March 2021

<p><b>Recommendation 9: Application of the Councillors' Code of Conduct</b></p> <p><i>The Code of Conduct, which has been updated, should have a short annex as part of the Code describing many of the more routine issues a Councillor may face and deal with the issues of perception, as set out in 3.2.4.</i></p> <p><i>In the section in the 'Preamble to the Code' reference is made to the need to 'comply with Protocols contained in or linked to the Council's Constitution'. In my opinion the relevant protocols should be explicitly identified, and consideration should be given as to whether any of the Codes or Protocols should form part of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.</i></p>	The Code of Conduct will be updated as recommended.	Monitoring Officer	March 2021
<p><b>Recommendation 10: Group discipline</b></p> <p><i>In serious cases or repeated cases, in addition to reference to the Standards Committee, Group Leaders should commit to the exercise of regulation through political groups.</i></p>	This will be raised at Group Leaders meetings. The Monitoring Officer will provide advice and guidance where appropriate. Group Leaders should remain committed to addressing serious matters within their Groups promptly and with the benefit of advanced discussions with statutory officers.	Group Leaders	Ongoing
<p><b>Recommendation 11: Monitoring Officer</b></p> <p><i>Monitoring Officers have a key role in supporting the Chief Executive and members on the ethical values of the Council. Some Councils undervalue the post of Monitoring Officer. The Council should not do so and should ensure that at all times the post holder has not just the required technical skills and personality to work constructively with members but also the strength to intervene and take action when advice is not heeded.</i></p>	<p>The Monitoring Officer role has been strengthened in recent years - as the Head of Legal, the post holder now manages both the Legal Services and Democratic Services teams, enabling a more joined-up approach. The Monitoring Officer is also now a regular member of the Corporate Governance Board and is benefitting from increased visibility within the organisation.</p> <p>It is important that the Monitoring Officer display both a depth of knowledge and experience in legal and governance matters but also have sufficient experience</p>	Chief Executive	Ongoing

	in such a role to afford the gravitas required to engage with Members and address interventions where required.		
<p><b>Recommendation 12: Revisions to Codes and Protocols</b></p> <p><i>The Council should consider the observations I make about the content of those documents. There needs to be explicit statements on members not instructing officers, and strong advice cautioning against meetings with developers/possible business partners or contractors.</i></p>	The Codes and Protocols will be reviewed in accordance with the recommendation.	Monitoring Officer	March 2021
	Member training will include a training module on the 'Member Inquiry Programme'.	Head of Organisational Development / Monitoring Officer	March 2021
<p><b>Recommendation 13: Member development and training</b></p> <p><i>The observations from members about short refresher sessions including on conflicts of interest should be considered. The Council should review how it inducts new members in particular to get them up to speed as soon as possible. If new members cannot navigate the Council properly and effectively it hampers them in their patch role. Training for all members on the new Councillors' Code of Conduct and the revised Codes, Protocols and Policies should be mandatory, emphasising issues such as perception.</i></p>	Mandatory training will be developed and delivered for all Members on these topics. The councillor development programme will be an ongoing programme, refreshed and enhanced every year going forward, and will clearly define the training available to Members including requirements for mandatory attendance.	Head of Organisational Development / Monitoring Officer	Ongoing
<p><b>Recommendation 14: Staff surveys and exit interviews</b></p> <p><i>The Council should re-introduce exit interviews for staff. Those exit interviews should be used along with staff survey data to assess the health of the organisation. The feedback from such interviews and the staff survey should be made available as part of the annual governance</i></p>	The HR service returned in-house in April 2020 which has provided an opportunity to review and improve the exit process. The Organisational Development team are currently considering how best to gather the necessary information from exit interviews in order to ensure knowledge gained feeds into lessons learnt and will document this in their policies and procedures.	Head of Organisational Development	March 2021

<p><i>statement and reported to the Standards Committee. There should be specifically worded questions in staff surveys about culture and relationships asked on an annual basis so the Council can track the health of the organisation.</i></p>	<p>Feedback provided within exit interviews will remain confidential. Analysis by the HR team of data collected will enable trends/concerns to be highlighted to the Staff Welfare Group and interventions identified to address these.</p>	<p>Section 151 Officer / Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
	<p>The Annual Governance Questionnaire, a survey which asks for respondents' self-assessment of how well governance arrangements are working in their service and feeds into the Annual Governance Statement, was opened up to all staff for the first time in January 2020. Each year the results are analysed, circulated and used to inform the governance work programme.</p> <p>In January 2021 the questionnaire will be repeated with new questions asking for respondents' views on the culture and values of the organisation. This will then be reported in the Annual Governance Statement 2020-21 which will be taken to Audit Committee in draft form in June 2021.</p>	<p>Section 151 Officer / Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>June 2021</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 15: Appraisal and development of officers</b></p> <p><i>Regardless of the comments in this review it is important that members do feel able to feed back to senior officers their perception of the performance of staff in accordance with that protocol. (In so doing they should recognise they may only see how an officer 'performs' in a member environment and may not be able to judge the officer's professional, technical, staff management and other skills). Senior officers should use that feedback to help with the development of staff.</i></p>	<p>The appraisal process for senior officers will be reviewed by the Head of Organisational Development in consultation with the Chief Executive and the Group Leaders and approach will be confirmed for arrangements going forward.</p>	<p>Head of Organisational Development</p>	<p>August 2021</p>

<p><i>However senior members of the controlling and opposition group should also have appropriate input into the annual appraisal of senior officers of the Council. The Council should consider how that could be structured for the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive should consider how this may be structured for direct reports and potentially Heads of Service.</i></p>			
<p><b>Recommendation 16: Looking forward</b>  <i>Members should put their energies into moving forward and consolidating improvements, rather than re-investigating the past.</i></p>	<p>At the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020 meeting of the Standards Committee, Members praised the work that has already been accomplished to address historic governance issues and acknowledged the importance of looking to the future. The Leader of the Council has made a public apology for behaviour that was allowed to continue under his administration and committed to holding regular Group Leaders meetings. It is hoped that a renewed effort for collaboration between the political groups will ensue and that these relationships will continue to strengthen and improve in the coming years.</p>	<p>Members</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 17: Further assessment</b>  <i>The Council should consider a further assessment of its culture and progress against these recommendations in 12 months' time, perhaps via a review report to Cabinet and the Standards Committee. I understand the Council is to invite the LGA to conduct a peer review next year; the Council should explore whether that process can deliver a suitable progress report on these recommendations.</i></p>	<p>Progress made against this action plan will be monitored and overseen by the Chief Executive and the Council's Corporate Governance Board, which will provide a follow-up report to Standards Committee in December 2021.</p>	<p>Chief Executive</p>	<p>December 2021</p>
	<p>The LGA peer review in 2021 will also consider corporate governance in the context of this review and the Chief Executive will ensure that this is stated in the Terms of Reference (though the final report may not be available until 2022, depending on continued uncertainties as a result of Covid-19).</p>	<p>Chief Executive</p>	<p>December 2021</p>