[redacted]

Governance review process

[redacted] offers a formal and comprehensive governance review to member councils as a chargeable service. These reviews share many similarities with the peer review process undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA) at principal authority level. The [redacted] governance review process will provide a final report to the commissioning council. Any recommendations are intended to help the council develop an action plan to address issues identified.

The review and subsequent report will provide an objective review of the council's structure and activity to assist with accountability, transparency and good governance. The review is not intended to identify specific areas for credit or blame, but to illustrate areas of relative strength or weakness as a positive and forward-looking exercise. Although the report will not attribute the source of any specific comments, it may not be possible to offer genuine anonymity to all contributors.

Interviews will be a maximum of 1 hour each. All councillors and key officers will be invited to be involved although it is often not necessary to speak to every councillor or member of staff. Other consultants, professional advisers or council volunteers may also be asked to contribute.

Interviews will include meetings (face to face or remote) with the

- chair
- vice-chair
- committee chairs
- clerk
- additional councillors or staff as required
- other consultants, professional advisers or council volunteers as required

The clerk will arrange timings and venue in consultation with contributors and [redacted].

Templates are available from the [redacted] website indicating information that will be required:

[redacted] Governance review checklist	To be completed by the clerk at the start of the process
[redacted] Governance review template	To form the starting point for questioning of councillors and officers

Cost to council: £2,500 (no VAT) plus travel expenses as appropriate

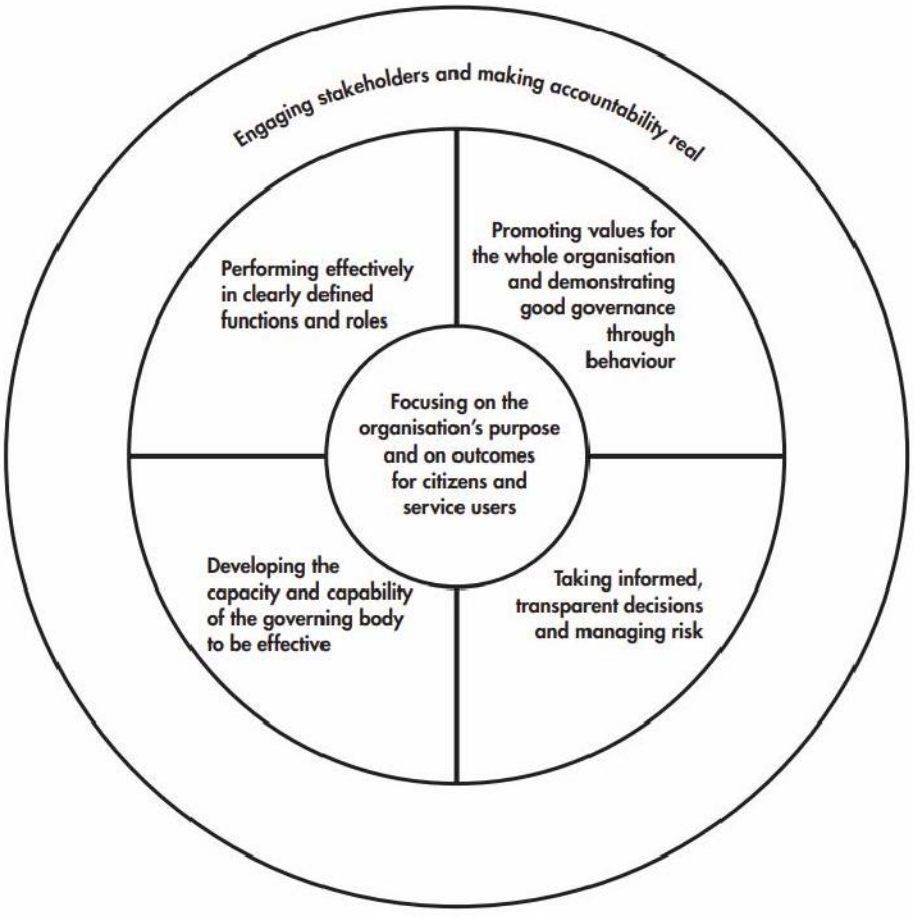
This will typically involve from [redacted]:

- Scrutiny of council website and documentation
- Interviews with key personnel as required
- Correspondence with clerk, chair and/or others
- Completion of draft report
- Sharing of draft report with clerk and chair with opportunity for comments to be addressed
- Presentation of final report to council, if required in person
- Support for council to create and implement action plan
- Review after 12 months

The report and any subsequent action plan will belong to the council who will take responsibility for publication and monitoring.

Principles

The governance review will be based on the following principles, adapted from these published by the Independent Commission on Good Governance in Public Services



The Good Governance Standard for Public Services

Good governance means	
focusing on the organisation's purpose and on outcomes for citizens and service users	• being clear about the organisation's purpose and its intended outcomes for citizens and service users • making sure that users receive a high quality service • making sure that taxpayers receive value for money
performing effectively in clearly defined functions and roles	• being clear about the functions of the governing body • being clear about the responsibilities of non-executives and the executive, and making sure that those responsibilities are carried out • being clear about relationships between governors and the public
promoting values for the whole organisation and demonstrating the values of good governance through behaviour	• putting organisational values into practice Individual governors behaving in ways that uphold and exemplify effective governance
taking informed, transparent decisions and managing risk	• being rigorous and transparent about how decisions are taken • having and using good quality information, advice and support • making sure that an effective risk management system is in operation
developing the capacity and capability of the governing body to be effective	• making sure that appointed and elected governors have the skills, knowledge and experience they need to perform well • developing the capability of people with governance responsibilities and evaluating their performance, as individuals and as a group • striking a balance, in the membership of the governing body, between continuity and renewal
engaging stakeholders and making accountability real	• understanding formal and informal accountability relationships • taking an active and planned approach to dialogue with and accountability to the public • taking an active and planned approach to responsibility to staff • engaging effectively with institutional stakeholders

CiPFA links

- Developing an effective assurance framework in a local authority 2023
- The Good Governance Standard for Public Services 2004

Local Government Association

Good practice in local government assurance includes

Visible, collective ownership and leadership of good governance by both political and managerial leaders	All members and officers should be able to see that the council's political and managerial leadership prioritise assurance activity and accountability. This includes taking difficult decisions as and when necessary.
Being a learning organisation	Continuous improvement requires continual learning and development. Self-awareness is an essential first step, with a recognition of both strengths and areas for development. Organisations which guard against complacency are less likely to be caught by 'unknown unknowns'. Openness to external challenge and a lack of defensiveness are also prerequisites. Continuing professional development is essential for both corporate statutory officers and the authority's political leadership.
Assurance as a constant process, not a one-off event	The external auditor's annual report mainly looks back at previous activity, and internal audit reports capture practice at a moment in time. Ensuring consistent use of processes and engagement with training, and use of monitoring information can help provide assurance between bigger assurance 'events'.
Assurance supports the achievement of priority outcomes	Assurance is not an end in itself. A culture of assurance and accountability is more likely to be embedded where elected members and officers understand that assurance activity keeps the council 'safe' and able to deliver for residents.
Making it easy for the public to hold the council to account	This includes communicating well with the public on the council's performance and ensuring public understanding of and access to key accountability opportunities and assurance information.

LGA links:

Improvement and assurance framework for local government

Government and assurance

Top tips for chief executives

Improvement and assurance framework: self-assessment tool

What will good governance look like for an [redacted] member council?

The council	
has a clearly defined purpose, and aims and objectives that are clear and understandable, that have been communicated clearly to the public	• priorities • plan • engagement • budgeting
is performing effectively with clear leadership.	• AGAR and governance • responding to internal and external audit reports • role of chair and committee chairs • difference between councillor and officer roles • process for ensuring decisions are legal • understanding of legal powers • section 137 payments • General Power of Competence • familiarity with financial regulations and standing orders • GDPR
has appropriate policies in place to show that it has standards, values and a code of conduct for members and staff	• policy checklist • complaints process • awareness of CoC • awareness of staffing procedures • standing orders, financial regulations, code of conduct are reviewed annually • policies are up to date and implemented
has decision making which is clear, informed, understandable and transparent. Risks are managed with an effective risk management system in place	• agendas and wording of items • publishing of agendas and minutes • informed decisions • risks and how they are considered • delegated authority • business planning for income generating activities. • monitoring of financial performance • buildings and asset management
develops and continually improves members and staff performance, so they have the capacity to and the capability of working effectively in their roles	• training policy • appraisal • mandatory training • range of councillor training attended
engages with its community, empowers them to be involved in the decision-making process and has a clearly defined community engagement policy and communicates effectively	• methods of communicating • co-opted non-councillors