

ANNEX 1**SOMERSET ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT – DRAFT CORPORATE GOVERNANCE ACTION PLAN 2024/25**

Interim External Auditor Annual Report 2022/23 (reported to Audit Committee in January 2024)

Somerset County Council and the four former district councils had an effective internal audit function in place for 2022/23, which was undertaken by SWAP. The Audit Plan was substantially delivered for each of the councils by March 2023 and this work informed the Head of Internal Audit's Annual Opinion. The County Council and the district councils all received a 'Reasonable Assurance' opinion for the overall control environment for 2022/23.

2023/24 Priority ratings for action by Somerset Council 2024/25:

Priority 1	Fundamental to the integrity of the organisation's policies and processes that require immediate attention
Priority 2	Important findings that need to be resolved
Priority 3	Finding that requires attention

2023/24 Summary of findings that require action by Somerset Council 2024/25 :

Priority 1	9	By end Q2 24/25*
Priority 2	41	By end Q4 24/25*
Priority 3	15	By end Q2 25/26*

- - dates set by Statutory Officers Board

Issue Reference	Action	Lead Director	Progress
	A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law		
GOV 23-24/A1 (somerset council) & A2 (parish councils)	Ongoing training and awareness raising of Members' Code of Conduct for members and work with SALC to deliver same outcomes for 279 City, Town and Parish Councils. Review documentation, feedback from 2023/24 and processes for member complaints to ensure consistency of approach	Senior SRO (SRO) : Monitoring Officer Target Date: Q4 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/A3	Keep up to date the Proper Officer list and functions in the Constitution throughout Transformation Programme and Organisational Change	SRO: Monitoring Officer Target Date: Q4 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/A4	Continued improvement of governance and communication of workforce policy and associated guidance, including embedding new ways of working. This includes ensuring strong messages around compliance and accountability, and a planned programme of work to identify and tackle areas of non-compliance.	SRO: Service Director-Workforce Target Date: Q4 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/A5	Improve and embed contract management training, awareness, compliance with Contract Procedure Rules for contract management activity; deliver policy and training to embed the Socially Responsible Procurement Policy across the Council; and strengthen our approach to working with SMEs and VCS'.	SRO: Service Director-Finance & Procurement Target Date: Q3 2024/25	

Issue Reference	Action	Lead Director	Progress
GOV 23-24/A6	Embed organizational values and behaviours and evidence this through my conversations and induction programmes for staff and members. Report quarterly on progress to HR Committee.	SRO: Service Director-Workforce Target Date: Q4 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/A7	Embed positive use of the capability and disciplinary processes along with embedding programme of induction for existing and new members of staff on values and behaviours and Officer Code of Conduct	SRO: Service Director-Workforce Target Date: Q2 2025/26	
GOV 23-24/A8	Review and update all current committee and decision making report templates and governance assurance processes to improve format, quality and evidence of compliance	SRO: Monitoring Officer Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/A9	Review communication, training, culture and organisation values and behaviours to ensure they are supporting delivery of Improvement & Transformation Programme	SRO: Executive Director-Strategy, Workforce & Localities Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/A10	Complete assessment and assurance that all services are undertaking regular line management and appraisals to ensure performance and focus of resources is directed to delivery of council priorities	SRO: Service Director-Workforce Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/A11	Undertake further promotion, communications and briefings to ensure that staff, members and public are aware of the Whistleblowing policy and Anti-Fraud & Corruption policy	SRO: Monitoring Officer Target Date: Q1 2025/26	

Issue Reference	Action	Lead Director	Progress
GOV 23-24/A12	Ensure Somerset Council Statement of Accounts and AGS 2023/24 completed by no later than 30 September 2024	SRO: Executive Director- Corporate Services & Resources Target Date: Q2 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/A13	Produce Workforce Equalities Report for 2023/24 in accordance with the Equalities Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations which requires all employers of 250 or more employees to publish their results against prescribed indicators of gender pay equality	SRO: Service Director- Workforce Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/A14	Ensure sufficient capacity and staff are suitably trained in order to respond to Ombudsman investigations completely and within agreed timescales	SRO: Executive Director- Strategy, Workforce & Localities Target Date: Q4 2024/25	

Issue Reference	Action	Lead Director	Progress
	B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement		
GOV 23-24/B1	Review MTFP Development and Governance processes prior to launching 2025/26 development and timetable with a focus on improving scrutiny involvement at early stages in the process	SRO: Service Director-Finance & Procurement Target Date: Q2 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/B2	Develop and implement a council-wide system for publishing relevant officer decisions involving expenditure over £100,000 in line with the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014	SRO: Monitoring Officer Target Date: Q4 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/B3	Review promotion, awareness, integration and better use of Customer Panel with Council's governance arrangements to demonstrate how feedback and influence of scrutiny, decision making, service delivery and development of Council Plan and MTFP 2025/26. Produce an annual report for Scrutiny and Executive.	SRO: Executive Director-Communities Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/B4	Complete overall evaluation of learning from complaints about organisation's performance. Report the findings annually to Scrutiny and Executive.	SRO: Executive Director-Communities Target Date: Q1 2025/26	
GOV 23-24/B5	Complete evaluation of communications strategy and activity to demonstrate that it is being focused on delivery of Council priorities and Improvement & Transformation Programme	SRO: Executive Director-Strategy, Workforce & Localities Target Date: Q1 2025/26	
GOV 23-24/B6	Improve evidence and systems for how service user and partner consultation informs and influences policy development, MTFP and Improvement & Transformation Programme	SRO: Executive Director-Strategy, Workforce & Localities Target Date: Q4 2024/25	

Issue Reference	Action	Lead Director	Progress
	C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits		
GOV 23-24/C1	Review Internal Governance arrangements to ensure they are streamlined to avoid duplication and focus available resources on the Council's priorities	SRO: Executive Director-Strategy, Workforce & Localities Target Date: Q4 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/C2	Review Council Plan in response to MTFP 2024/25 and Improvement & Transformation Programme	SRO: Executive Director-Strategy, Workforce & Localities Target Date: Q2 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/C3	Develop and finalise Council Business Plan to clearly set out council and service priorities for 2024/25	SRO: Executive Director-Strategy, Workforce & Localities Target Date: Q2 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/C4	Ensure service plans are in place to clearly set out service priorities and resources to deliver Business Plan and Council Plan priorities for 2024/25	SRO: Executive Director-Strategy, Workforce & Localities Target Date: Q2 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/C5	Review existing regeneration and place shaping governance to put in place effective governance arrangements and plans to meet the Council's needs	SRO: Executive Director-Climate & Place Target Date: Q2 2025/26	
GOV 23-24/C6	Develop and secure approval to Gravity Investment Plan with consequential amendments to approved Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25 through Scrutiny, Executive and Full Council	SRO: Executive Director-Climate & Place Target Date: Q2 2024/25	

Issue Reference	Action	Lead Director	Progress
GOV 23-24/C7	Develop plan and governance for creation of single Local Development Plan for Somerset Council to replace existing local plans and report to Scrutiny and Planning and Transport Policy Sub-Committee	SRO: Executive Director-Climate & Place Target Date: Q1 2025/26	
Issue Reference	Action	Lead Director	Progress
	D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes		
GOV 23-24/D1	Ongoing review of HR policies and prioritization of changes to ensure that they reflect the needs of the business and the Transformation Programme.	SRO: Service Director-Workforce Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/D2	Embed and deliver Asset Management Strategy and Capital Investment Strategy to support future transformation and place shaping ambitions and deliver MTFP 2024/25	SRO: Executive Director-Corporate Services & Resources Target Date: Q2 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/D3	Embed and deliver Improvement and Transformation Programme targets for 2024/25 to support organisation vision and deliver MTFP 2024/25	SRO: Executive Director-Strategy, Workforce & Localities Target Date: Q2 2024/25	

Issue Reference	Action	Lead Director	Progress
	D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes		
GOV 23-24/D4	Focus on wider external partnership opportunities that will help take Somerset forward and report these to Scrutiny and Executive i.e. Regeneration Boards, Town Deals, LEP transition, etc.	SRO: Executive Director-Strategy, Workforce & Localities Target Date: Q4 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/D5	Improve reporting to ELT, Scrutiny and Executive regarding Adults Services governance oversight: operational compliance, continued ability to deliver statutory duties, delivery of demand led services within 2024/25 budget envelope and the transition from Children’s to Adults Services provision.	SRO: Executive Director-Adult Social Care Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/D6	Improve reporting to ELT, Scrutiny and Executive regarding delivery and management of Dedicated Schools Grant Deficit Management Plan	SRO: Executive Director-Childrens Services Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/D7	Improve reporting to ELT, Scrutiny and Executive of the Council’s strategic leadership role in relation to schools. Refer to partnership working, support schools to deliver a good or better level of education and learning, including improvement of quality of secondary school provision and outcomes.	SRO: Executive Director-Childrens Services Target Date: Q4 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/D8	Improve reporting to ELT, Scrutiny and Executive regarding Childrens Services governance oversight: operational compliance, continued ability to deliver statutory duties, delivery of demand led services within 2024/25 budget envelope and the transition from Children’s to Adults Services provision.	SRO: Executive Director-Childrens Services Target Date: Q3 2024/25	

Issue Reference	Action	Lead Director	Progress
	D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes		
GOV 23-24/D9	Better benchmarking against peer councils to be undertaken to help compare Key Performance Indicators 2024/25 and to regularly report this to Scrutiny and Executive as Council is benchmarking against itself and previous performance of legacy councils	SRO: Service Director- Strategy & Performance Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/D10	Address audit findings regarding CLA Placements Contract and Procurement	SRO: Executive Director- Childrens Services Target Date: Q2 2024/25	

Issue Reference	Action	Lead Director	Progress
	E. Developing the Council's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it		
GOV 23-24/E1	Ensure effective governance of the next phase of health and social care integration and effectiveness of the Somerset Board and for this to be reported to the Board along with its priorities for 2024/25	SRO: Executive Director - Public Health Target Date: Q4 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/E2	Embed and deliver internal training and development programmes for staff to support delivery of essential services and the Improvement & Transformation Programme	SRO: Service Director - Workforce Target Date: Q2 2025/26	
GOV 23-24/E2	Embed and deliver internal training and development programmes for members to support delivery of Council priorities and the Improvement & Transformation Programme	SRO: Monitoring Officer Target Date: Q2 2025/26	
GOV 23-24/E3	Develop and secure approval through ELT and HR Committee to a Workforce Plan for 2024/25	SRO: Service Director - Workforce Target Date: Q4 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/E4	Review and measure the impact of leadership and development programmes on staff retention and performance	SRO: Service Director - Workforce Target Date: Q1 2025/26	

Issue Reference	Action	Lead Director	Progress
	F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management		
GOV 23-24/F1	Strengthen the Council's approach to commissioning, procurement and contract management	SRO: Executive Director-Corporate Services & Resources Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/F2	Ensure robust governance and delivery of the Capital Programme, including major infrastructure projects across Highways and Education services	SRO: Executive Director-Corporate Services & Resources Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/F3	Ensure sufficient capacity to support the delivery of the DLUHC External Assurance Review and secure the Capitalisation Direction	SRO: Executive Director-Corporate Services & Resources Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/F4	Improve service planning, performance, risk management and budget monitoring reporting and frequency to ELT, CLT, Scrutiny and Executive	SRO: Executive Director-Strategy, Workforce & Localities Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/F5	Embed and get greater visibility and ownership of the Strategic Risk Register by ELT and Executive, together with regular monitoring and updating of individual risk areas by all services. Ensure the Strategic Risk Register is reported at least quarterly to Audit Committee, Scrutiny Corporate & Resources and Executive meetings.	SRO: Executive Director-Corporate Services & Resources Target Date: Q3 2024/25	

Issue Reference	Action	Lead Director	Progress
GOV 23-24/F6	Report to Audit Committee at least six monthly on progress with delivery of actions within the AGS Action Plan	SRO: Monitoring Officer Target Date: Q4 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/F7	Ensure that Audit Committee considers any reports received during 2024/25 from external inspection agencies that raise matters of concerns regarding governance, risk management and internal control and the management response to these	SRO: Executive Director-Corporate Services & Resources Target Date: Q2 2025/26	
GOV 23-24/F8	Ensuring robust arrangements in place for business continuity	SRO: Executive Director-Corporate Services & Resources Target Date: Q4 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/F8	Ensure robust arrangements in place for the resilience of ICT systems	SRO: Executive Director-Corporate Services & Resources Target Date: Q4 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/F9	Ensure robust arrangements in place for health and safety compliance across all services. Improve regular oversight by ELT, CLT, Scrutiny and Executive of Health & Safety issues and mitigations	SRO: Executive Director-Strategy, Workforce and Localities Target Date: Q2 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/F10	Develop and establish a strategy and an Ethics Board or body accountable for reviewing the Council's use or proposed use of Artificial Intelligence to support delivery of its services and cost efficiencies	SRO: Executive Director-Strategy, Workforce and Localities Target Date: Q2 2025/26	
GOV 23-24/F11	Address internal audit recommendations regarding limited assurance of financial controls assessment post 1 April 2023	SRO: Executive Director-Corporate Services & Resources Target Date: Q2 2024/25	

Issue Reference	Action	Lead Director	Progress
GOV 23-24/F12	Address internal audit recommendations regarding limited assurance of Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS)	SRO: Executive Director-Childrens Services Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/F13	Address internal audit recommendations regarding housing landlord health and safety compliance (fire safety)	SRO: Executive Director-Communities Target Date: Q2 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/F14	Limited assurance regarding direct payments (Adults)	SRO: Executive Director-Corporate Services & Resources Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/F15	Assurance on delivery of developing and delivering mitigating actions to manage demand and costs in relation to Adults Services	SRO: Executive Director-Adults Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/F16	Assurance on delivery of developing and delivering mitigating actions to manage demand and costs in relation to Childrens Services	SRO: Executive Director-Childrens Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/F17	Assurance on delivery of implementing the Transformation Programme at scale and pace in order to address the significant structural budget deficit	SRO: Executive Director-Strategy, Workforce and Localities Target Date: Q4 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/F18	Assurance on delivery of proper governance arrangement being in place to oversee the disposal of commercial investment property portfolio following Council decision to dispose of these investments	SRO: Executive Director-Corporate Services & Resources Target Date: Q3 2024/25	

Issue Reference	Action	Lead Director	Progress
GOV 23-24/F19	Assurance on ensuring that General Fund and Earmarked Reserves are maintained at prudent levels in order to provide financial resilience	SRO: Executive Director-Corporate Services & Resources Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/F20	Assurance on governance continuing to develop the functionality of the Microsoft Dynamics finance system and resolve outstanding processes at pace to ensure that the system supports efficient and accurate financial reporting	SRO: Executive Director-Corporate Services & Resources Target Date: Q3 2024/25	
	G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability		
GOV 23-24/G1	Review and improve how performance can be communicated to the public to deliver maximum openness and transparency, including financial information as part of this.	SRO: Executive Director-Strategy, Workforce and Localities Target Date: Q2 2025/26	
GOV 23-24/G2	Complete recruitment and training for co-opted member vacancies on scrutiny and audit committees	SRO: Monitoring Officer Target Date: Q4 2024/25	
GOV 23-24/G3	Review focus the Scrutiny Committees and Audit Committee work programmes during 2024/25 to have greater oversight of delivery of Council Plan Priorities, MTFP 2025/26 development and Transformation Prog	SRO: Monitoring Officer Target Date: Q1 2025/26	
GOV 23-24/G4	Complete assessment of delivery of services within available resources against the statutory guidance on the Best Value duty	SRO: Executive Director-Corporate Services & Resources Target Date: Q4 2024/25	