

GOVERNANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORT

Purpose of Report

- To provide members of the Audit Committee with an overview of progress against recommendations to improve governance.

Recommendation(s)

The Audit Committee is recommended to note the report.

Financial Implications

There are a number of minor financial implications e.g. an extension to the Member and Officer training programme, bringing in the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to review the Constitution, and appointment of an independent member for the audit committee. All are considered relatively low value and necessary to achieve intended improvement.

Legal Implications

There are no Legal implications related to approving the Action Plan. However, it should be noted that the actions within the plan contain several activities relating to changes to the Council's Constitution.

Risk Assessment

Failure to adhere to the action plan could mean that the Council does not implement improvements that have been identified as necessary by external review bodies. This could have reputational impacts and may lead to future scrutiny on the effectiveness of governance and performance at the Council.

Environmental / Climate Change Implications

No direct implications.

Report Author

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Executive Member

Cllr Richard Keeling – Leader of the Council

1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Implementation of recommendations aimed at improving governance have been ongoing since an initial Corporate Peer Review was undertaken by the Local Government Association in January 2024. The action plan arising from this was approved by Council on 29 October 2024 and reviewed by the Peers during a follow up visit to the Council in February 2025.
- 1.2 The Council's governance has also been monitored by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) and the Council's external auditor, Grant Thornton. The external audit resulted in 6 statutory recommendations [approved by the Audit Scrutiny Committee](#) on 13 February 2025 and full Council 25 February 2025.
- 1.3 Improvement actions were also included in the [Annual Governance Statement 2023-2024](#)
- 1.4 Progress against recommended improvements is shown in the tables below.

2. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

For members to note the report.

3. GROUPS CONSULTED

Not applicable.

4. DATE OF IMPLEMENTATION (CONFIRMATION OF DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL-IN)

Not applicable.

Governance Improvement Plan – Audit Committee update – 2nd September 2025

Peer Review Action Plan

Theme: Relationships			
Action	Measure	Lead officer / member	Timescale
Senior Officer Availability for Group Meetings	Senior Leadership and Senior Management Team officers will be available to attend meetings with the Council's various political groups to discuss and advise on relevant topics on council agendas, questions and topic areas identified in advance.	Senior Leadership Team, Group Leaders	On request (SLT meet with Group Leaders monthly)

Theme: Constitution			
Action	Measure	Lead officer / member	Timescale
Defining strategic roles and responsibilities	<p>Develop an Executive Members / Strategic Leadership Team charter that clarifies respective roles, responsibilities and commitments and embeds this into the Council's constitution. Establish role profiles for Executive Members, clarifying their duties and accountability, including communicating relevant information throughout the Council.</p> <p><i>Update April 2025: This is being addressed through the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Working Group. Amendments to the constitution were postponed from the February 2025 Full Council to be added to the agenda for the Annual Council meeting in May 2025.</i></p> <p><i>Update Sept 2025: Ongoing - the Role Profiles element was started and discussed in the working group, but due to go back to the working group on 25th September for further discussion.</i></p>	Managing Director / Leader	December 2024
Governance and Constitution Review	<p>Having completed the first stage review with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, a task and finish group has been created to review and recommend to Full Council, amendments and changes to the constitution.</p> <p><i>Update April 2025: Amendments to the constitution were postponed from the February 2025 Full Council to be added to the agenda for the Annual Council meeting in May 2025.</i></p>	Monitoring Officer / Leader	July 2025

	<p><i>Update Sept 2025: The first stage of work has been completed and a number of changes to the Constitution were agreed by Full Council in May 2025. SLT agreed another stage of work with CFGS which is due to begin in September 2025 with the working group for this meeting every 3 weeks. The Democratic Services Team Leader / Deputy Monitoring Officer, is working through the Constitution and making minor amendments which in accordance with the scheme of delegation.</i></p>		
Decision making flow-chart	<p>Linked to the constitution review, update website with a simple explanation on how council decisions are made. This information should be accessible to councillors, officers, stakeholders, businesses and residents and act as an index that also leads to more detailed information (e.g. links to constitution sections).</p> <p><i>Update April 2025: This task will be allocated to the recently appointed Democratic Services Team Leader and Monitoring Officer.</i></p> <p><i>Update Sept 2025: Completed 22.8.25</i> <u>How we make decisions - Teignbridge District Council</u></p>	Democratic Service Team Leader	March 2025

Theme: Council Strategy and Partnerships

Action	Measure	Lead officer / member	Timescale
Adopt and implement a new 'One Teignbridge' Council Strategy	<p>Following engagement with the community and partners in shaping the Council Strategy, the Council will adopt the strategy and accompanying action plan that sets out priorities and key actions over the life of the Strategy.</p> <p><i>Update April 2025: The One Teignbridge Council Strategy was formally adopted on the 14th Jan 2025. Working groups are now meeting based around the five themes to develop the Action Plan.</i></p> <p><i>Update Sept 2025: We have met with various partners, elected Councillors, staff members and community groups to agree priority actions for our Action Plan. The final Action Plan will be taken to Full Council in October 2025 to ask approval for adoption.</i></p>	Director of Place / Head of Partnerships and Strategy	January 2025

Refresh Council Strategy Performance and Risk Monitoring Framework	<p>Overhaul existing Council Strategy monitoring processes and systems to streamline reporting of key progress indicators and ensure that budget considerations are at the forefront of planning and implementation. Our monitoring framework will also monitor ongoing customer needs and community feedback, so that it can be used to help inform Partnership Board recommendations and Council Strategy Action Plan decisions.</p> <p><i>Update April 2025: The One Teignbridge Council Strategy Action Plan will define new performance indicators and involve the creation of an easily accessible monitoring system through PowerBI.</i></p> <p><i>Update Sept 2025: Performance indicators have been proposed which align with the new Local Government Outcomes Framework and other national reporting, to allow comparison between TDC and partner authorities. These will be reported through interactive PowerBI dashboards, presented to the Council Strategy Working Group for review, and brought before Full Council in October 2025.</i></p>	Director of Place / Head of Partnerships and Strategy	July 2025
Ongoing engagement with Town and Parish Councils	<p>An ongoing programme of communication involving detailed workshops on key issues like town planning to build trust, cooperation, and community involvement. This work will involve understanding one another's priorities and potentially co-creating a charter for mutually beneficial working relationships.</p> <p><i>Update April 2025: Development of this charter has been delayed by staff absence within DALC, but work is ongoing to develop this charter by bringing together a working group of representative Town and Parish councils. Representative Town and Parish Councils have been invited to join the One Teignbridge Council Strategy Action Group, and the Head of Development Management has organised a series of Planning Workshops for Town and Parish Councils.</i></p> <p><i>Update Sept 2025: A Town and Parish Council Working Agreement is due to come to the Executive on 7th October for approval.</i></p>	Director of Place / Head of Partnerships and Strategy	On-going

Theme: Functioning authority			
Action	Measure	Lead officer / member	Timescale
Appoint Opposition Overview and Scrutiny Chairs	<p>Appoint a chair and vice-chair from opposition political parties to Overview and Scrutiny Committee to foster greater transparency and fairness.</p> <p><u>Update Sept 2025: Completed May 2025.</u></p>	Leader	May 2025
Routine briefings ahead of complex decisions	<p>Continue specialist officer briefings for councillors ahead of all complex (determined by the relevant Executive Member/s) committee decisions and provide updates and (ordinarily) annual refresher sessions throughout long-term project implementation (like Modern 25) or decision-making phases, including reminders about previous council decisions.</p> <p><u>Update Sept 2025: A number of these have taken place or are scheduled e.g. Public Conveniences, Local Govt Review, Planning, Migration and Refugees.</u></p>	Lead officers will vary per theme	Ad hoc
Centralised Record of Council Decisions	<p>Enhance or replace existing systems into a centralised and searchable repository of all council decisions and subsequent progress with projects. This will ensure transparency, accountability and easy access to up to date information for councillors, officers and members of the public.</p> <p><u>Update April 2025: This task will be allocated to the recently appointed Democratic Services Team Leader and Monitoring Officer.</u></p> <p><u>Update Sept 2025: This has now been implemented.</u></p>	Democratic Service Team Leader	April 2025
Essential Officer Training	<p>Implement and maintain an ongoing programme of officer training centered on the council constitution; officer/member protocol; and ensuring timely and effective communication with councillors, town and parish councillors and other key partners.</p> <p><u>Update April 2025: A training session run by DALC on working with Town and Parish Councils has been arranged for officers in April 2025.</u></p> <p><u>Update Sept 2025: The Democratic Services Team Leader / Deputy Monitoring Officer is available for support as and when required.</u></p>	Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development	April 2025

Establish an Invest to Save Budget	<p>Bring forward a medium-term financial plan and annual budget with an 'Invest to Save' provision that grows to at least £500,000, enabling us to allocate resources to delivering long-term efficiencies.</p> <p><i>Update April 2025: This was agreed at the 2025 budget meeting: £400,000 was already identified at 31 March 2024, planned to increase again to £500,000 at 31 March 2025.</i></p> <p><i>Update Sept 2025: The closing of the accounts 24-25 incorporated an increase in reserves to £500k.</i></p>	Director of Corporate	February 2025
Introduce a new modern finance system	<p>Retain sufficient staff resources to ensure delivery of the project, with dedicated project managers at both Teignbridge District Council and Strata.</p> <p><i>Update April 2025: Additional Project Management resource has been approved and hiring processes are being completed with expected start dates in May 2025.</i></p> <p><i>Update Sept 2025: Due to difficulties in implementation experienced by all three councils, a decision has been made to cease further work on the project and realign resources to improving the existing FMS system until May 2026 when we will have better information around who our LGR partners will be.</i></p>	Director of Corporate	May 2026

Grant Thornton – Auditor’s Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2024

Statutory Recommendations:

Recommendation Feb 2025	Council Response Feb 2025	Update Sept 2025
SR1. Appoint a suitably qualified expert to investigate the underlying causes of member behaviours which contravene standards and develop an action plan to enable members and officers to address these issues.	The Council has commissioned the CfGS to conduct reviews and are working with them to review the constitution. Members of the administration have had workshops with officers to improve the working relationship and clarify roles.	Hoey Ainscough Associates have been appointed. Arranging an officer / member survey and in-person meetings scheduled for mid October.
SR2. Adopt a zero-tolerance approach to any swearing, lack of respect for others, or other abusive behaviour using full procedural rules.	Agreed. Support and training is given to chairs and members but there is a lack of support from councillors across the chamber to address this behaviour in meetings.	Ongoing - the Monitoring Office is supporting chairs of meetings. A new member strategy has been approved by SLT which includes mandatory chair training.
SR3. Consider amendments to the constitution to extend those procedural rules from to all meetings of committees of the Council and amend the Member Code of Conduct to include an obligation for all members to reinforce standards of behaviour and to support the Chair of the Council and chairs of committees in their use of procedure rules to ensure proper conduct. Group Leaders should model good behaviour and discipline members of their groups whose behaviour breaches the Code of Conduct and the member / officer protocol.	The Council has adopted the LGA model code and as stated above Chairs receive specific training.	Procedure rules apply to all meetings. Further review of the Code of Conduct will be undertaken when the pending new Government guidance is released, in line with recommendation from the CfGS. The Group Leader role profile is to be discussed 25 th September 2025 at a working group meeting.
SR4. Continue to provide information and support to ensure that members and officers who are subjected to aggressive and abusive behaviour from individual members can, if they wish, submit a written complaint to the Monitoring Officer immediately, so that it can be dealt with under the the Council’s Standards procedures.	Members and officers are aware of the process to raise a Standards complaint and are supported to do so.	Ongoing.

SR5. Ensure that Group Leaders take responsibility for their members working collaboratively with officers and for their members improving behaviours and relationships.	Agreed.	Noted and part of role profile.
SR6. Review membership of the Standards Committee, with only members who have an excellent behavioural track record being eligible to join it. Meetings should then resume. A Governance Committee should be introduced to reinforce the work of the Standards Committee. Governance Committee members must also have an unblemished behavioural track record.	Agreed.	Completed. Governance Committee approved at Council 29 th July 2025.

Key Recommendations:

Recommendation Feb 2025	Council Response Feb 2025	Update Sept 2025
KR1. Members do not always understand which aspects of Council business they do or do not have access to by law. Members need to be clear about what they can and cannot have access to. The Constitution outlines matters for meetings that members of the public are excluded from ("Part 2 meetings"). Where Part 2 meetings are used, all present should adhere to the legal confidentiality requirements of Part 2 meetings.	Noted and agreed. Officers will continue to work with Members to reiterate the importance of aspects of confidentiality and Part 2 meetings.	Members are made aware and breaches will be dealt with as a Code of Conduct issue.
KR2. The Council should review arrangements around declarations of interest and investigations. An internal audit of interests should be arranged.	Noted. We will review and audit as part of our annual audit plan.	The Internal Audit review is currently in progress.
KR3. Decision making arrangements at Executive Committee and Full Council level should be reviewed and, where necessary, strengthened. The planned decision flowchart should be completed.	Agreed. We are currently progressing a decision flow chart.	In progress – in Monitoring Officer work plan.

Improvement Recommendations:

Recommendation Feb 2025	Council Response Feb 2025	Update Sept 2025
IR1. Peer Review Action Plan from 29/10/24 to be implemented and monitored.	Noted. This work is being revisited as part of the CFGS Working Group's agreed work programme.	See above.
IR2. The Council should continue with its return to Audit and Scrutiny Committee reviewing the risk register twice a year.	Agreed. This is being implemented within the work programme.	Completed.
IR3. The Council should review the constitution to bring ToR of the Audit Scrutiny Committee into CIPFA best practice, including co-option of external independent member, election of opposition/independent chair, and renamed to remove term 'Scrutiny'.	The Constitution is being reviewed as part of the work with the CfGS. Independent member – remuneration agreed, and job description / advertisement are ready to go.	Completed. Full Council agreed updated TOR and renaming 29 th July 2025. Independent member has been appointed.
IR4. The Council should recognise good practice and consider the election of an opposition of independent member as chair of O&S	Agreed. The Council recognises what is generally considered to be best practice whereby an opposition member or independent is appointed as chair of O&S and consideration has been given to that. However, it also recognises it is guidance and the importance of having the right person in that role.	Not implemented.
IR5. The Council should continue to monitor progress with implementing a new finance system.	Agreed.	See above Peer Review comment – this project is now on hold pending LGR.
IR6. Draft accounts for 24/25 should be published in line with statutory deadline, support by comprehensive set of working papers and capacity to support an audit to completion.	Noted. Our timetable for 24/25 closedown works towards these revised dates. We are progressing sufficient staffing resources and will look to negotiate an external audit that takes place in a timely manner that doesn't clash with other key work or priorities.	Completed. (Stat deadline exceeded by 4 days).

<p>IR7. The Council should seek to reduce its dependency on the Funding Reserve to close budget gaps, then stabilise its reserves over the medium term.</p>	<p>Agreed.</p>	<p>Modern 25 programme and Business Plan savings are ongoing.</p>
<p>IR8. Maintain the arrangements now in place so that performance on non-major planning applications remains above the government's minimum target.</p>	<p>Agreed. The Council has implemented processes to maintain the current high level of performance. These arrangements are currently working well.</p>	<p>Completed. Performance remains above target: 94.3% of decision are within timescale for the year to date 29 August.</p>