

23 November 2021

Report of	Monitoring Officer	Author	Andrew Weavers ☎ 282213
Title	Review of the Council's Ethical Governance Policies		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report requests the Committee to review the Council's updated Ethical Governance policies. These are the key policies which set out the standards of conduct and integrity that the Council expects of councillors, staff, partners, suppliers and customers when conducting Council business. They contain procedures for dealing with breaches of the policies and processes to be followed.
- 1.2 The report also requests the Committee to recommend to Full Council to include the updated policies in the Policy Framework which comprises all of the Authority's key policies.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To recommend to Full Council that it adopts the statement of intent in relation to ethical governance.
- 2.2 To review the following revised policies:
 - Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy
 - Whistleblowing Policy
 - Anti-Money Laundering Policy
 - Covert Surveillance Policy
 - Colchester Borough Council Social Media RIPA Policy
 - Data Protection Policy
 - Acceptable Use Policy
 - Information Security Policy
 - Retention Policy
 - Income and Debt Management Policy

and to recommend to Full Council that they be approved for inclusion in the Council's Policy Framework.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council is committed to maintaining the highest standards of governance including the elimination of fraud and corruption and to ensuring that all activities are conducted ethically, honestly, openly and accountably in order to protect public safety and public money.
- 3.2 A varied range of policies and procedures form the Corporate Governance framework and a selection of these relate to Ethical Governance - those specifically regarding conduct and integrity.

- 3.3 The Ethical Governance policies set out the standards of conduct and integrity that it expects from staff, elected members, suppliers, partners, volunteers and the public. Breaches of the policies will be pursued, and procedures have been introduced to enable any person to raise genuine concerns they may have about the conduct of anybody acting for or on behalf of the Council.
- 3.4 At its meeting on 3 December 2020 Full Council adopted a statement of intent in relation to both Ethical and Corporate Governance which gave a high organisational commitment to zero tolerance of fraud, corruption and bribery. It is appropriate following the change of Administration and Leader to refresh the statement of intent which is attached at Appendix 1. The Committee is recommended to refer this to Full Council for adoption.

4. Review of Ethical Governance Policies

- 4.1 The Anti-Fraud and Corruption, Whistleblowing, Anti-Money Laundering, Covert Surveillance, Information Security, Data Protection, Acceptable Use, Data Retention and Income and Debt policies were last reviewed by this Committee at its meeting on 24 November 2020. The Ethical Governance policies were subsequently adopted as part of the Council's Policy Framework by Full Council.

The following table indicates the number of times a policy was invoked in the past year and where appropriate whether it was effective.

Policy	No. of times invoked during 2017/18	No. of times invoked during 2018/19	No. of times invoked during 2019/20	No. of times invoked during 2020/21	Whether procedures effective
Anti-Fraud and Corruption	None	None	None	None	n/a
Whistleblowing	None	1	None	None	n/a
Anti-Money Laundering	None	None	None	None	n/a
Covert Surveillance	None	None	None	None	n/a
Information Security	None	None	None	None	n/a
Data Protection	None	None	None	None	n/a
Acceptable Use	-	-	None	None	n/a
Data Retention	-	-	None	None	n/a

- 4.2 The Anti-Fraud and Corruption, Whistleblowing, Anti-Money Laundering, Covert Surveillance, Information Security, Data Protection, Acceptable Use and Data Retention policies have all been reviewed to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and no changes are proposed to these policies which are appended to this report.
- 4.3 The Committee at its meeting on 7 September 2021 considered and agreed a new Processing of Special Category & Criminal Convictions Personal Data Policy. This was subsequently endorsed by Full Council at its meeting on 20 October 2021 and was included as part of the Council's Policy Framework. This Policy will be reviewed annually going forward as part of the annual review of ethical governance policies.
- 4.4 The Monitoring Officer writes an annually to both Members and Officers reminding them of their obligations regarding the Anti-Fraud and Corruption and Whistleblowing policies. Councillors have recently received updated data protection and cyber security training from the Council's IT team.
- 4.5 The Income & Debt Management Policy has been reviewed and there are no proposed changes for this year. The processes are still relevant and meet legislative requirements, whilst supporting strong collection rates.

- 4.6 During the last full financial year, the Council achieved high collection rates for Council Tax despite the impacts of Covid-19, this has continued into 2021/22. Business rates collection has been more significantly impacted, with those not supported through Government grants or relief still struggling to pay. The Council has worked to support those struggling whilst encouraging flexible arrangements to maintain some payments from those businesses most affected. It is anticipated that the ongoing effects of Covid-19 will impact on business rates collection through to 2022/23.
- 4.7 The Council continues to improve processes, making payment options simple for residents and businesses and encouraging customers to contact as soon as possible if they are suffering financial difficulties.

5. Strategic Plan References

- 5.1 The manner in which the Council governs its business is an underpinning mechanism in the Council's Strategic Plan priorities to set out the direction and future potential for our Borough.

6. Publicity Considerations

- 6.1 The Council's ethical governance policies will be published on the Council's website.

7. Financial, Equality, Diversity and Human Rights, Consultation, Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety, Health and Safety, Risk Management and Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 7.1 None.

Colchester Borough Council will not tolerate breaches of its ethical governance policies.

The Council is committed to maintaining the highest standards of governance including the elimination of fraud and corruption and to ensuring that all activities are conducted ethically, honestly, openly and accountably so as to protect public safety and public money.

The Council expects the highest standards of conduct and integrity from all that have dealings with it including staff, elected members, suppliers, partners, volunteers and the public. Therefore, policies have been put in place to outline the standards required and procedures have been introduced to enable any person to raise genuine concerns they may have about the conduct of anybody acting for or on behalf of the Council.

The Ethical Governance policies form part of the Council's overall Corporate Governance framework and details of all the policies have been published on the Council's website at www.colchester.gov.uk.

We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that concerns are investigated, and appropriate action taken where necessary. There will be no distinction made in investigation between cases that generate financial benefits and those that do not.



Paul Dundas
Leader of the Council



Adrian Pritchard
Chief Executive

