



Governance and Audit Committee

Item

9

13 December 2023

Report of	Head of Governance and 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 the Authority's key policies.

2. Recommended Decisions

- 2.1 To review the following revised policies:

- Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Anti-Money Laundering Policy
- Covert Surveillance Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy
- Information Security Policy
- Retention Policy
- Processing of Special Category & Criminal Convictions Personal Data Policy
- Password Policy
- Income and Debt 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 1 December 2022 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. The statement of intent is attached at Appendix 1.

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, Processing of Special Category & Criminal Convictions Personal Data, ICT Password and Income and Debt policies were last reviewed by this Committee at its meeting on 22 November 2022. 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 2021/22	No. of times invoked during 2022/23	Whether procedures effective
Anti-Fraud and Corruption	None	None	n/a
Whistleblowing	None	2	yes
Anti-Money Laundering	None	None	n/a
Covert Surveillance	None	None	n/a
Information Security	None	None	n/a
Data Protection	21	23	yes
Acceptable Use	None	None	n/a
Data Retention	None	None	n/a
Special Data Policy	None	None	n/a
Password Policy	-	None	n/a

- 4.2 The Anti-Fraud and Corruption, Whistleblowing, Anti-Money Laundering, Covert Surveillance, Information Security, Data Protection, Acceptable Use, Data Retention and Processing of Special Category & Criminal Convictions Personal Data, ICT Password and Income and Debt 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 Council's Covert Surveillance Policy and procedures were the subject of a recent inspection by the Investigatory Powers Commission Office. Local Authorities are subject to a triennial review of their procedures. The Inspection concluded that the Investigatory Powers Commissioner was satisfied that the Council satisfactorily demonstrated compliance with the legislative requirements. The opportunity was also taken to provide refresher training for key officers.
- 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 and staff have recently received updated data protection and cyber security training from the Council's IT team.
- 4.5 The Income and Debt Policy has been reviewed and there are no proposed changes. The processes are still relevant and meet legislative requirements, whilst supporting strong collection rates.

- 4.6 The Council continues to achieve high collection rates for Council Tax and Business Rates. The teams are working to support customers through the cost of living crisis and are adapting processes where necessary to do this.
- 4.7 The Council will continue 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 Council's governance arrangements form part of the Council's commitment to delivering modern services for a modern city which underpins the Council's Strategic Plan vision.

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 City 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.

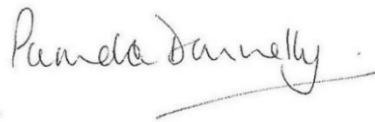
The Council expects the highest standards of conduct and integrity from all that have dealings with it including staff, elected members, suppliers, partners, volunteers and the public. Therefore, policies have been put in place to outline the standards required and procedures have been introduced to 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.



David King
Leader of the Council



Pamela Donnelly
Chief Executive

