

Good Practice Examples & Self-assessment Questions

1. Good governance means focusing on the purpose of the authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area

Welcome constructive challenge as an opportunity to Learn and improve performance. It may come from a variety of forms - external audit, regulatory, inspection, peer review, commissioned consultants or input from other high-performing authorities.

Questions:

- How clear are we about what we are trying to achieve as an authority?
- Do we always have this at the front of our minds when we are planning or taking decisions?
- How well are we doing in achieving our intended outcomes?
- How well do we communicate our vision to the community?
- To what extent does the information that we have about the quality of service for users help us to make rigorous decisions about improving quality?
- Do we receive regular and comprehensive information on users' views of quality?
- How could this information be improved?
- How well does the organisation understand the views of the public and service users?
- Do we receive comprehensive and reliable information about these views and do we use it in decision making?

2. Good governance means members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles

It is good practice for political parties to identify the future skills base and type of representation needed for politicians and, using appropriate selection methods, to take steps to fill these gaps when seeking candidates for election and for succession planning.

It is good practice for new chief executive and leader pairings to consider how best to establish and maintain effective communication.

Questions:

- Do we all know what we are supposed to be doing?
- Is our approach to each of the authority's main functions clearly set out and understood by all the authority members and the leader and senior cabinet members?
- Have we formally agreed on the types of decisions that are delegated to the executive and those that are reserved for the full council?
- What does the size and complexity of our organisation mean for the ways in which we approach each of the main functions of governance?
- Are the governance arrangements understood throughout the authority? What

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efforts have been made to 'demystify' the concepts of governance? Have they been successful?

- How clearly have we defined the respective roles and responsibilities of the non-executives and the executive, and of the chair and the chief executive?
- Do all members of the authority take collective responsibility for its decisions?

3. **Good governance means promoting values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour**

It is good practice for members and officers to reject offers of hospitality, such as invitations to sporting events, from firms that the authority is contracting with, or may contract with in the future.

Questions:

- In what ways does our behaviour, collectively as a governing body and individually as governors, show that we take our responsibilities to the organisation and its stakeholders *very* seriously?
- Are there any ways in which our behaviour might weaken the organisation's aims and values?
- Does the standards committee act as the main means to raise awareness? Does it take the lead in ensuring high standards of conduct are firmly embedded within the local culture?
- What are the values that we expect the staff to demonstrate in their behaviour and actions?
- How well are these values reflected in our approach to decision making?
- What more should we do to ensure these values guide our actions and those of staff?

4. **Good governance means taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk**

Although scrutiny generally looks at issues and policies once they are in place, scrutiny should also take place at the policy development stage.

Questions:

- How well do our meetings work?
- What could we do to make them more productive and do our business more effectively?
- Is the quality of information received across service areas consistent, including partnerships?
- To what extent does the information that we have on costs and performance help us to make rigorous decisions about improving value for money?

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- How effectively do we use this information when we are planning and taking decisions? How well do we understand how the value we provide compares with that of similar organisations?
- Is this set out in a clear and up-to-date statement?
- How effective is this as a guide to action for the full council and the executive?
- How well do we explain the reasons for our decisions to all those who might be affected by them?
- Are decision-making processes properly adhered to?
- How do we ensure the full council maintains a key role in debating decisions?
- Is the information received by all council members robust and objective and appropriate for their needs?
- How could the information received be improved to help improve our decision making?
- Do we take professional advice to inform and support our decision making when it is sensible and appropriate to do so?
- How effective is the organisation's risk management system?
- How do we review whether this system is working effectively?
- Do we develop an action plan to correct any deficiencies in the systems?
- If so, do we publish this each year?
- Is the scrutiny function adequately resourced?
- Does the scrutiny function work effectively? Is the outcome of constructive scrutiny taken into account?

5. Good governance means developing the capacity and capability of members and officers to be effective

It is good practice for political parties to appraise the performance of those that are elected and put in place training and development programmes to fill any skills gaps and also for future politicians.

It is good practice for appraisals of a chief executive's performance to be externally validated.

Questions:

- What skills have we decided that members must have to do their jobs effectively?
- How well do the political parties identify people with the necessary skills to seek election and reach people from a wide cross-section of society?
- What more could we do to make sure that becoming an authority member is practical for as many people as possible?
- How effective are we at developing our skills and updating our knowledge?
- How effective are political parties at reviewing the performance of individual members?
- Do we put into practice action plans for improving our performance as an authority?

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- How do we ensure officers have the necessary skills to do their jobs? Are officers adequately resourced?
- Is it possible to find a balance between continuity of knowledge and renewal of thinking in the authority membership? Do we have a policy on succession planning?
- Does this need to be reviewed?

6. Good governance means engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability

Local authorities are well placed to understand and respond to particular challenges within the local community. By bringing together key representatives from community, religious and political groups they can encourage debate on such issues as integration and policing and focus on shared values.

Questions:

- Who are we accountable to and for what?
- How well does each of these accountability relationships work?
- Do we need to take steps to clarify or strengthen any relationships?
- Do we need to negotiate a shift in the balance between different accountability relationships?
- How do we deal with competing demands and priorities from different sections of the community? Are the processes we use effective?
- What is our policy on how the organisation should consult the public and service users?
- Does it explain clearly the sorts of issues on which it will consult which groups and how it will use the information if receives?
- Do we need to review this policy and its implementation?
- What is our policy on consulting and involving staff and their representatives in decision making?
- Is this communicated clearly to staff?
- How well do we follow this in practice?
- How effective are systems within the organisation for protecting the rights of staff?
- Who are the institutional stakeholders that we need to have good relationships with?
- How do we organise ourselves to take the lead in developing relationships with other organisations at the most senior level?
- How well do we exercise 'leadership' for the community?
- Are we upholding and demonstrating the spirit and ethos of good governance that the Framework sets out to capture?
- Do we have a process for regularly reviewing our governance arrangements and practice against the Framework?
- What further improvements do we need to make?
- Are we making public the results of our reviews and our plans for future improvements? Are we inviting feedback from stakeholders and service users?