

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: Director of Finance

REPORT NUMBER: **J44**

TO: **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
(STEWARDSHIP) COMMITTEE**

DATE OF MEETING: 23 June 2009

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2008/09

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report reviews the Council's Corporate Governance arrangements as required by the Accounts and Audit (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2006. An Annual Governance Statement has to be prepared and approved each year and this is the responsibility of the Overview and Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee, which acts as the Council's Audit Committee.
- 1.2 The Council will approve the Statement of Accounts for 2008/09 at its meeting on 25 June 2009, which will include the Annual Governance Statement. Any matters raised by the Committee will, therefore, need to be reported accordingly.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That, subject to the Director of Finance being authorised to make any minor amendments following consideration by the Committee, the Annual Governance Statement attached as Appendix A be approved, based on the evidence contained in supporting Annex A.
- 2.2 That Mr D G Grutchfield and Mr C A Roberts continue to serve on the Members' Governance Group and receive reports, and supporting evidence, from officers to review the progress made on the 2008/09 Annual Governance Statement and the adequacy and effectiveness of Internal Audit.
- 2.3 That the Chairman of the Strategy Committee be authorised to sign the 2008/09 Annual Governance Statement on behalf of the Council.

The Committee is able to resolve these matters.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 This report is most closely linked with the Council's Significant Business Risk No. 7 - Financial, Performance and Risk Management. Key risks are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
Failure to regularly monitor and improve the Council's arrangements could weaken corporate governance, have an impact on service delivery, lead to adverse comments from the Audit Commission and impact on the Council's external inspection assessments.	Low	Critical	The Statement is fully supported by relevant documentation and evidence. An action plan to address the issues identified will be incorporated in the Council's overall Corporate Improvement Plan.

5. KEY INFORMATION

Background

- 5.1 The Accounts and Audit (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2006 require the Council to prepare and publish an Annual Governance Statement (AGS).
- 5.2 The preparation and publication of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) meets the statutory requirement of the Accounts and Audit Regulations, which requires authorities to “conduct a review at least once in a year of the effectiveness of its system of internal control” and to prepare a statement on internal control “in accordance with proper practices”. It is the responsibility of this Committee to monitor and review the Council’s Corporate Governance arrangements.
- 5.3 Governance is about how the Council ensures that it is doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. It comprises the systems, processes, cultures and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and through which it is accountable to, engages with and, where appropriate, leads communities.
- 5.4 This Committee at its meeting on 30th September 2008 approved a revised Local Code of Corporate Governance (Paper H115) in line with the updated Framework ‘Delivering Good Governance in Local Government’ issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE). The core governance principles under the code are as follows:
- Focusing on the purpose of the Council and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area;
 - Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles;
 - Promoting values for the Council and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour;
 - Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk;

- Developing the capacity and capability of members and officers to be effective; and
- Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust accountability.

5.5 The governance framework is designed to facilitate the efficient and effective achievement of the Council's policies, aims and strategic priorities and to identify and manage risk to a reasonable level. The governance framework is embedded within the Constitution and the systems, procedures and operations in place throughout the Council.

5.6 The Local Code of Corporate Governance that was approved in September 2008, addresses these principles in more detail. The 2008/09 AGS has regard to this and the arrangements that are in place. This is attached at **Appendix A** and covers:

- The Council's responsibilities in terms of the governance framework;
- Babergh's governance environment relating to the six laid down corporate governance principles (**Annex A** refers); and
- The effectiveness of Babergh's arrangements and any governance issues identified, with proposed actions to address these.

The Role of the Overview and Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee

5.7 The AGS covers the system of internal control and risk management, within the overall corporate governance arrangements. This Committee has responsibility for scrutinising the AGS. In undertaking its role it is suggested that the Committee:-

- Considers the AGS (**Appendix A and supporting Annex A**) and the proposed actions to address the issues highlighted. It is asked to focus on section 4.6, which sets out the key aspects of the review for 2008/09 and the findings;
- Gives its views on any matters that need further consideration.

Officers will address the issues identified through an action plan as part of the Council's overall Corporate Improvement Plan (covering Use of Resources and the Audit and Inspection Letter as well as issues from the AGS).

Assurance Arrangements

5.8 The Acting Audit Manager has had responsibility for co-ordinating the collection of evidence and together with the Director of Finance (the Council's S151 Officer) has evaluated assurances and supporting evidence to determine whether they are consistent with the governance framework.

5.9 To measure the Council's compliance with the requirements of the approved Local Code of Corporate Governance, Management Team and two senior managers completed a self-assessment on the Corporate Governance Framework.

5.10 Evidence already held corporately and subject to assessment (principally the Council's Use of Resources self-assessment) has also been used to support the AGS.

5.11 The outcome of completing the self-assessment on Corporate Governance Framework and supporting evidence forms the basis of the actions in section 4.6 of the AGS, which will be signed-off by the Chairman of the Strategy Committee and the Chief Executive. Any changes this Committee wishes to make to the AGS will be made before it is signed.

6. **APPENDIX**

Appendix A - Annual Governance Statement

7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS REFERRED TO**

None.

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Babergh District Council

DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2008/09

1. Scope of Responsibility

- 1.1. Babergh District Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 1.2 In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council needs to put in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions.
- 1.3 The Council has approved and adopted a Local Code of Corporate Governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA (the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy)/SOLACE (the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers) Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government'. The principles are listed in 3.1.

A copy of the code is on the Council's website at:

<http://www.babergh.gov.uk/Babergh/Home/About+us/How+we+work/Local+Code+of+Corporate+Governance.htm>

- 1.4 This statement explains how the Council has complied with the Local Code and the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework, and also meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations in relation to the publication of a statement on internal control. Findings in terms of significant areas and issues that need further action are set out in Section 4.
- 1.5 This statement assesses the Council's governance framework for the year ended 31 March 2009 and up to the date of approval of the Statement of Accounts.

2. The Purpose of the Governance Framework

- 2.1. Governance is about how the Council ensures that it is doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner.
- 2.2. The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and the way in which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic aims and priorities and to consider whether these have led to the delivery of high-quality, cost effective services, which meet the needs of those using them.

2.3. The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an on-going process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

3. Systems and processes that comprise the Council's governance arrangements

3.1. The core governance principles of the Council (taken from the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework), as set out in the Local Code of Corporate Governance, are as follows:

- Focusing on the purpose of the Council and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area;
- Members and officers working together to achieve common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles;
- Promoting values for the Council and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour;
- Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk;
- Developing the capacity and capability of members and officers to be effective; and
- Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability.

3.2 Examples of key evidence to support and demonstrate the Council's governance arrangements against the core principles, as listed above, are reported in **Annex A**.

4. Review of Effectiveness

Current corporate governance arrangements

4.1 Babergh District Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control.

4.2 For 2008/09, this has been achieved through:

- Completion of the Corporate Governance Self Assessment Checklist by Management Team and two senior officers;
- The Head of Audit's overall opinion of the Council's internal control arrangements as reported in his Annual Audit Report 2008/09; and

- Reports submitted by the External Auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.
- 4.3 A Member group has been involved in reviewing the following as part of the production of the AGS:
- Review of the AGS Action Plan 2008/09, which addressed areas for improvement identified in the 2007/08 statement;
 - Annual review of the adequacy and effectiveness of internal audit; and
 - Review of the Corporate Governance Self-Assessment Checklist.
- 4.4 The AGS is reported to and considered by External Audit, which has responsibility for ensuring that robust corporate governance arrangements are in place.

Systems and processes in place

- 4.5 In addition to **Annex A**, further examples of the Council's arrangements during 2008/09 were:-
- The Council has delegated to the Overview & Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee, which acts as the Council's Audit Committee, the responsibility for reviewing the adequacy of internal controls, monitoring the performance of internal audit, monitoring the effectiveness of the risk management framework, monitoring corporate performance of the Council and considering the governance arrangements.
 - Clear scrutiny arrangements to develop policy and monitor the decisions of the Strategy Committee exist. Overview and Scrutiny Committees can 'call-in' a Strategy Committee decision, which has been made but not yet implemented to enable them to consider whether the decision was made in an appropriate manner.
 - An effective Standards Committee is maintained, which regulates and oversees the national Code of Conduct. The Monitoring Officer maintains the Council's Constitution and promotes high standards of conduct through the provision of support to the Standards Committee.
 - The Council's Management Team meet 2/3 times a month to discuss strategic matters together with endorsing specified reports prior to them being considered by the Council's relevant Committees.
 - The Council's Internal Audit section has responsibility for monitoring the adequacy and effectiveness of the systems of internal control. Audits were undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government in the United Kingdom 2006. Internal Audit carried out an annual review of its compliance against these standards set out by CIPFA and has produced an action plan against these. The Internal Audit section is subject to regular reviews by the Council's external auditors.

- In terms of the work carried out by Internal Audit for 2008/09, the Head of Internal Audit in his annual report was of the opinion that the Council's overall internal control arrangements provide an acceptable level of assurance and that there is satisfactory management of risk, although some elements of the control framework require further development.
- Internal Audit reports directly to the Director of Finance, who is also the Section 151 Officer. The Head of Internal Audit and the Acting Audit Manager has the right of direct access to the Chief Executive and the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee, which acts as the Council's Audit Committee.
- A report on each audit, including recommendations for improvement, was issued to the Director of Finance and other relevant directors and Heads of Service. To further strengthen management arrangements, the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive now receive all audit reports that have a 'Not fully Acceptable' or 'Poor' audit opinion. There are timely reviews and follow up of recommendations to ensure that they are acted upon. Internal Audit also undertake fraud investigations and fraud detection work.
- The Council has an Anti-Fraud and Corruption and Whistleblowing Policy, which provide measures to enable confidential public and officer concerns to be raised with the Council. The policy was reviewed and approved by the Overview & Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee in January 2009. In addition, a formal complaints policy exists to deal with other matters of public concern regarding services provided by the Council.
- A Significant Business Risk Register is in place and appropriate staff have been trained in the assessment, management and monitoring of risks. The Risk Management process is reviewed to ensure its relevance to the Council and the Overview and Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee receive quarterly updates on risk management. Members and relevant staff received refresh workshops during 2008/09.
- The Council has put in place arrangements to ensure effective performance monitoring and management arrangements. The Management Team, Heads of Service and relevant managers actively manage that framework. The Overview & Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee receives quarterly reports on Finance and Performance Management. Reports are linked on areas identified as requiring the attention of both Overview and Scrutiny Committees. In addition, staff have followed up on areas for improvement identified through the data quality audit. The Council now has a clear set of policies (approved by Strategy Committee) and action plan in place to ensure that we continue to secure further improvements in 2009.
- The Audit Commission's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2007/08, presented to this Committee in May (Paper J20), reports that the Council is making improvements across many of its priority areas, although recognises that the rate for improvement needs to increase. On the Use of Resources Assessment, it is pleasing to report that the Council has maintained its level 3 score, which means that it is judged as 'Performing Well'. This assessment recognises improvements in internal control arrangements (including risk management).

Governance issues identified

4.6 Based on the 2008/09 review of governance arrangements, the **main issues** that have been identified that require attention are:

- Ensure that informal and 'lower level' complaints are dealt with more effectively, through the Customer Access and Service Transformation (CAST) Action Plan.
- Ensure that there are clear arrangements for partnership working to provide assurance that the governance arrangements within the partnerships the Council belongs to are appropriate to manage risks, finances and data quality.
- Continue and develop new ways to deliver and demonstrate Value for Money, linked to achieving efficiencies and using cost and performance information to inform that.
- Improve workforce planning through use of HR establishment data and the Organisational Development Plan.
- Further develop and monitor its internal and external communications and consultation strategy to secure meaningful two-way engagement and feedback.

4.7 The above issues will be addressed as part of the Council's overall improvement planning arrangements, including a Corporate Improvement Plan that will include actions arising from Audit and Inspection reports and the Audit Commission's Use of Resources Assessment. The Overview & Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee will be responsible for monitoring the main issues identified in 4.6 above, whether this be through a specific Action Plan or through the Corporate Improvement Plan. It is the intention that progress made against the issues identified in 4.6 above will be reported back to the Overview & Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee in November 2009.

5. Chief Executive and Chairman of Strategy Committee Statement of Assurance

5.1 We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that have been identified and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Signed
Pat Rockall, Chief Executive

Signed
Nick Ridley, Chairman of Strategy Committee

Date

Date.....

	CORE PRINCIPLES	SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES	BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL EVIDENCE
1	<p>Focusing on the purpose of the authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area.</p>	<p>Exercising strategic leadership by developing and clearly communicating the Council's purpose and vision and its intended outcome for citizens and service users.</p>	<p>A ten-year strategic plan for Babergh District Council has been developed for 2008-2018. The development process included extensive consultation with the local community and key stakeholders including surveys of residents, service users, focus groups and specific initiatives to engage with all sections of the community including groups such as young people and migrant workers.</p> <p>The following key themes emerged from this consultation process and form the basis for the Council's corporate priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greener and cleaner Babergh • Quality homes local people can afford • A safer and healthier Babergh • A strong and sustainable community • Vibrant places and communities <p>This is supported by a three-year rolling Medium Term Plan and a one year Delivery Plan, which provides the detailed basis for individual service plans, key delivery initiatives and work schedules for the Council.</p> <p>The Council also holds an annual State of the District Debate as part of its Policy and Budget making process. Having undertaken an extensive review in the previous year (development of the Strategic Plan), the 2008/09 debate focused on changes that had occurred over the year, and in particular the increased pressure on individuals, businesses and institutions as a result of the economic recession.</p>

	CORE PRINCIPLES	SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES	BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL EVIDENCE
			<p>There is consultation with key partners on improvements to service provision and individual projects.</p> <p>E.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the Local Area Agreement, which looks to ensure that both county wide and local priorities are aligned to the Council’s Strategic Plan, thereby maximising opportunities, e.g. deployment of resources. • Through the Local Strategic Partnerships (East and West), which contribute to the planning and greater understanding of community needs. Example of projects in each area include: The Hadleigh Project in the east, which has identified and commissioned services for young people targeted at those Not in Education or Employment or Training (i.e. NEET); The Sloppy Slippers Project in the west, 490 new pairs of slippers were purchased aimed at reducing falls and accidents in the home from ill fitting and old slippers.
		<p>Ensuring that users receive a high quality of service whether directly, or in partnership, or by commissioning.</p>	<p>The Council is very pro-active in its approach to the commissioning and procurement of services and the use of the web to drive improvements.</p> <p>E.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Procurement Strategy and Framework (2008-11) is in place that reflects the Council’s corporate aims and priorities and provides value for money. There is an Action Plan to support the strategy and a Procurement Task Group (made up of Members and officers) to monitor, review and update the Action Plan.

	CORE PRINCIPLES	SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES	BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL EVIDENCE
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement practices have improved through the introduction of new Contract Procedure Rules and the introduction of an E-Procurement software system across the Council. • The Council has in place clear service delivery standards publicised on its website and literature. • The Customer Access & Service Transformation (CAST) programme has successfully delivered effective front office arrangements. For example, this has increased the proportion of business completed with customers at point of contact. Some key outcomes of 2008/09 include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 90% of callers flowing through the front office teams are satisfied with the service they receive. ➤ 80% of calls received are resolved at point of contact. • The Council is constantly working to improve website content and functionality to enable customers to self-service. E.g. online access is possible for Planning applications; Council taxpayers; Benefit claimants; Council tenants and Business ratepayers have direct access to their personal account. Online forms allow customers to submit benefit claims, report problems; report fraud, make a complaint or submit a compliment. • This year’s tenant satisfaction survey continued the trend indicating that the Council provides a high quality maintenance and repair service, and high satisfaction levels as a landlord. • The waste and recycling customer surveys also indicate a high level of service.

	CORE PRINCIPLES	SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES	BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL EVIDENCE
			<p>Services are subject to Use of Resources audit and self-assessment process with a current overall rating of 3 (3 = consistently above minimum requirements – performing well).</p>
		<p>Ensuring that the authority makes best use of resources and that taxpayers and service users receive excellent value for money.</p>	<p>The Council’s strategy and processes are aimed to set Council Tax at no more than the level of inflation.</p> <p>There is a strong leadership, ownership and responsibility for all financial matters through the Corporate Management Team and Members. Financial assumptions are challenged and skills are being continuously developed. The Council has significantly strengthened its integrated process to strategic and financial planning. A Member Strategic and Financial Planning (SFP) Task Group, supported by officers, was established early in 2008/09 to oversee the integrated process.</p> <p>At Senior Management level, Management Team, Heads of Service and Managers developed a 3-year Medium Term Plan, which reflect the Council’s aims and priorities.</p> <p>Internal Audit carry out a risk based programme of inspections ensuring controls are in place and effective. These controls encompass financial systems, corporate governance arrangements, risk management and performance management.</p>

	CORE PRINCIPLES	SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES	BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL EVIDENCE
2	<p>Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles.</p>	<p>Ensuring effective leadership throughout the authority and being clear about executive and non-executive functions and of the roles and responsibilities of the scrutiny function.</p>	<p>The Council operates a streamlined Committee arrangement, which is reflected in the Constitution.</p> <p>The Council's Constitution sets out the roles and responsibilities of Councillors, the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman of Council and Committees. It also details the rules of procedure and Overview & Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference.</p> <p>The Council's Scrutiny Committees play an important role in that they hold decision takers to account through scrutinising their activities. During 2008/09, the scrutiny function provided challenge to the Council n a number of ways. For example the Overview & Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee, which also acts as the Council's Audit Committee, scrutinised the progress of the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Plan; • Service and financial planning; • Internal Audit and Benefit; • Risk Management; and • Performance Management. <p>The above is reflected in their Annual Report to Council.</p> <p>The Constitution sets out the roles of Chief Officers and Statutory Officers and the responsibility for functions. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chief Executive is the Head of Paid Service in accordance with Local Government and Housing Act 1989;

	CORE PRINCIPLES	SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES	BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL EVIDENCE
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Director of Finance is Section 151 Officer of the Local Government Act 1972 and is responsible for making sure that appropriate advice is given to the Council on all financial matters, for keeping proper financial records and accounts, and for maintaining an effective system of internal financial control; and • The Monitoring Officer who is responsible for ensuring that the Council acts in a lawful manner and that it does not do anything that might cause maladministration or injustice.
		<p>Ensuring that a constructive working relationship exists between authority members and officers and that the responsibilities of authority members and officers are carried out to a high standard.</p>	<p>A Standards Committee is in place which is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct and ethics across the Council, monitoring the operation of codes of conduct for Councillors and staff, developing good practice protocols, overseeing the whistle-blowing procedure and investigations by the Ombudsman into complaints against the Council.</p>
		<p>Ensuring relationships between the authority and the public are clear so that each knows what to expect of the other.</p>	<p>The Council on its website and through various literature provides members of the public with details of service delivery standards. E.g.</p> <p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once we have all the information we need to assess Housing or Council Tax Benefits, we will complete the assessment within 14 days. • If your circumstances change, or you make an enquiry we aim to amend our records within 6 days.

	CORE PRINCIPLES	SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES	BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL EVIDENCE
			<p>Building Control:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site Inspections to be made within 24 hrs of a request - on the same working day when the request is received before 10.30am. • All plans to be vetted within 5 weeks of receipt (or 8 weeks when an extension of time agreed) <p>Bus passes for elderly and disable people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to issue bus passes to qualifying persons within 10 working days of application being approved. Application forms are available from the website or by telephoning the above number. <p>The Council is involved in a wide range of networks and partnerships, including the co-ordination and delivery of the Local Strategic Partnerships for Babergh East and West Suffolk and the Suffolk Strategic Partnership. Governance arrangements for partnerships will always vary depending on the size and scope of the partnership. E.g. LSP's have no legal status but the two covering Babergh area have a constitution. The Haven Gateway partnership manages its activities through a management agreement. In addition, a Significant Partnership Register has been developed and roles and responsibilities of partners are clear. Partnerships are monitored through the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.</p>

	CORE PRINCIPLES	SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES	BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL EVIDENCE
			<p>Members of the Overview & Scrutiny (Community Services) Committee were advised of the outcome of the review of the Council’s Strategic Partnerships, in March 2008. The review looked at how effective the governance arrangements were including risk and accountability.</p> <p>Through the Customer Access and Service Transformation (CAST) programme services are well publicised and accessible at times, which reflect customer needs. Access has been simplified and made more understandable. High rates of customer satisfaction are being achieved. Resolution of calls at point of contact has averaged around 80%, customer satisfaction is in excess of 90%.</p>
3	Promoting values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour.	Ensuring authority members and officers exercise leadership by behaving in ways that exemplify high standards of conduct and effective governance.	<p>The Council’s governance arrangements are set out in the Constitution. This document includes the roles and responsibilities of senior officers and members, which are reinforced through induction and training programmes.</p> <p>There is a Members’ Code of Conduct and Confidential Information Protocol, which Members must sign. The Monitoring Officer and Standards Committee manage the Members’ Code of Conduct.</p> <p>For officers, codes and protocols are issued on appointment and reinforced through the induction process and guidance. Breaches of proper standards are investigated and resolved using the HR Disciplinary, Capability or Grievance procedures. Behavioural conduct is also addressed through the annual Performance Appraisal process.</p>

	CORE PRINCIPLES	SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES	BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL EVIDENCE
			<p>The Code of Conduct for Members and staff includes a register of interests and of gifts and hospitality.</p> <p>These are in place to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the standards of personal behaviour councillors, officers and agents of the Council must follow; and • Ensure that elected councillors and officers are not influenced by prejudice, bias or conflicts of interest in dealing with different stakeholders.
		<p>Ensuring that organisational values are put into practice and are effective.</p>	<p>The Council has set out its values to its stakeholders within the Strategic Plan as a series of pledges.</p> <p>The Council has adopted an Organisational Development Plan (updated in 2008), which aligns staff, skills development and employment policy and practices to the aims and objectives of the organisation. It will also assist with future workforce planning.</p> <p>Regularly, twice yearly the Chief Executive addresses all staff on the current issues and challenges facing the Council. Similarly the Chief Executive addresses the Members through their quarterly seminars.</p> <p>The Monitoring Officer looks to promote the Code of Conduct for Members of Parish and Town Councils through a training programme. E.g. a training course entitled ‘Councillor Conduct – Complaints and How to Avoid Them’ was held in February 2009.</p>

	CORE PRINCIPLES	SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES	BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL EVIDENCE
			<p>In addition, training for Parish and Town Councillors is a standard item on the Standards Committee agenda.</p> <p>The Council's Financial Regulations and Procedures, contained within the Council's Constitution, make it clear that any suspected irregularities should be reported to the appropriate officers. The Council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption and Whistleblowing Policy is available on the Council's website. Annual reminders are issued to staff and members advising them of the arrangements for reporting any matters of concern.</p>
4	Taking informed and transparent decisions, which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk.	Being rigorous and transparent about how decisions are taken and listening and acting on the outcome of constructive scrutiny.	All Agendas and Minutes of Council meetings are recorded and available to the public (except where there are legal restrictions). There is an active scrutiny function, which plays an active and robust role in managing performance. Training on the Scrutiny function has been made available for councillors in order to ensure a high standard of scrutiny.
		Having good-quality information, advice and support to ensure that services are delivered effectively and are what the community wants/needs.	<p>Council meetings are supported by trained committee staff. Report-writing advice and guidelines have been provided to enable report authors to provide good quality information in plain English to promote transparent, accessible decision-making.</p> <p>The Council recognises the importance of having reliable information to support the delivery of excellent services to its customers. For example, the Council has invested in the Local Authority Modernisation Programme (LAMP). This is a national initiative designed to improve the quality and usability of the Council's land and property information.</p>

	CORE PRINCIPLES	SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES	BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL EVIDENCE
			<p>The Council has followed up on areas for improvement identified through last year’s data quality audit. The Council now has a clear Data Quality Policy (approved by Strategy Committee) and action plan in place to ensure that we continue to secure further improvements in 2009. Data quality is promoted by the Data Quality ‘champions’ (which together form the Performance Indicator Co-ordinators Group) and reinforced corporately through the Manager and Team Leader Forums.</p> <p>The Council’s Performance Management Framework outlines the relationship between the Council’s various business management and reporting systems. It also sets out accountability arrangements for the collection, recording and reporting of all statutory and business critical data.</p>
		<p>Ensuring that an effective risk management system is in place.</p>	<p>The Overview and Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee ensures that the Council identifies and effectively manages its significant business risks, which impact on achievement of the Council’s corporate aims and priorities.</p> <p>Risk Management action plans have been drawn up by officers in relation to each significant risk and progress made in managing the risks is monitored by this Committee on a quarterly basis. At service level risk management assessments are being incorporated into service plans across the Council. In addition, the Council has provided training and refresher workshops to its staff and members during 2008/09.</p>

	CORE PRINCIPLES	SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES	BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL EVIDENCE
		<p>Using their legal powers to the full benefit of the citizens and communities in their area.</p>	<p>Decisions taken are in the best interests of the community of Babergh. E.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) the needs of the community are realised. The past year has seen a significant increase in Babergh CSP activities with a number of targeted crime prevention initiatives and high profile events designed to heighten awareness and inform the public about community safety issues. Improvements have also been made in tackling Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) with, for example, the implementation of a structured ASB process and a reporting and recording system at BDC • The Council has adopted the Government’s Enforcement Concordat which states that good enforcement practice should set clear standards, be carried out in an open, helpful manner and have a proportionate and consistent approach, together with a clear complaints service. <p>Key action and decisions are reported to the Overview & Scrutiny (Community Services) Committee.</p>

	CORE PRINCIPLES	SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES	BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL EVIDENCE
5	Developing the capacity and capability of members and officers to be effective	Making sure that members and officers have the skills, knowledge, experience and resources they need to perform well in their roles.	<p>The Council aims to ensure that Members and staff have the skills, knowledge and capacity they need to discharge their responsibilities and recognise the value of well-trained and competent people in effective service delivery. All new Members and staff undertake a comprehensive induction to familiarise themselves with protocols, procedures, values, aims and priorities of the Council.</p> <p>The Council has adopted an Organisational Development (OD) Plan (updated in 2008), which aligns staff, skills development and employment policy and practices to the aims and objectives of the organisation.</p> <p>Individual training and development needs for staff are systematically identified and activities followed up and evaluated through a performance appraisal system that includes all staff. A corporate training plan is tailored to meet the OD Plan objectives.</p> <p>The annual appraisal also provides a mechanism for assessing key skill areas linked to job requirements and identifying needs. The Scheme was last updated and improved following a review undertaken by a staff-working group in 2008.</p>

	CORE PRINCIPLES	SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES	BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL EVIDENCE
		<p>Developing the capability of people with governance responsibilities and evaluating their performance, as individuals and as a group.</p>	<p>The Council delivers an ongoing training and development programme for Members throughout the year based on the skill requirements as assessed by Members themselves and on topical issues suggested by senior officers.</p> <p>For officers, individual training and development needs are systemically identified and activities followed up and evaluated through a performance appraisal system.</p> <p>In addition, a corporate training plan is tailored to meet the Organisational Development Plan objectives. Over 2008/09 this has supported Managers to improve their skills in identified priority areas.</p>
		<p>Encouraging new talent for membership of the authority so that best use can be made of individuals' skills and resources in balancing continuity and renewal.</p>	<p>The Council is currently developing a 'self-assessment questionnaire' for Members to complete and return that will identify any training and development needs they may require. This will ensure that Members have the opportunity to take advantage of any future training that they need to get them to where they see themselves in the future.</p> <p>The Council has a clear Member development programme. Skills and talents of Members are identified from which Member 'Champions' are appointed. Members also represent the Council on outside bodies.</p>

	CORE PRINCIPLES	SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES	BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL EVIDENCE
6	Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability	Exercising leadership through a robust scrutiny function, which effectively engages local people and all local institutional stakeholders, including partnerships, and develops constructive accountability relationships.	There are two Overview and Scrutiny Committees, (one of which acts as the Council’s Audit Committee), which support the work of the Strategy Committee and the Council as a whole. They hold investigations into matters of local concern and developing reports and recommendations and advise the Strategy Committee on policies, budget and service delivery. They monitor Strategy Committee decisions, and have call-in powers as set out in the Council’s constitution.
		Taking an active and planned approach to dialogue with and accountability to the public to ensure effective and appropriate service delivery whether directly by the authority, in partnership or by commissioning.	<p>The Council is committed to listening to local people and involving them in the achievement of these outcomes.</p> <p>All meetings of the Council are open to the press and public. At meetings of the Council, Babergh residents have the opportunity to ask a question of any Committee Chairman which has been submitted in writing at least two days before the meeting. The Agenda sets out the business to be dealt with at the meeting. Some items, usually at the end of the Agenda, may be confidential, and the press and public will be asked to leave before they are discussed.</p> <p>As part of the review of the Council’s Strategic Plan, the Council consulted with the public and other stakeholders through the annual State of the District Debate. It also held its annual meeting with businesses.</p> <p>In addition, the Council conducted its Place Survey National Indicator exercise through the Suffolk Speaks partnership. Details of the analysis are expected soon from central government.</p>

	CORE PRINCIPLES	SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES	BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL EVIDENCE
		<p>Making best use of human resources by taking an active and planned approach to meet responsibility to staff.</p>	<p>The Council has an Organisational Development Plan in place, which details the Council’s vision of how to develop and support staff in securing the future of the Council and services to the people of Suffolk. An Action Plan sets out the medium term plans resulting from this plan.</p> <p>The Council has a well established dialogue with Unison and the HR Panel.</p> <p>The HR Panel, which includes Members and a Unison representative receive regular updates on OD Plan progress.</p> <p>Organisational change is fully recognised and addressed by the Council, being a separate theme within the OD Plan. In staff briefings and team meetings throughout the year, the Chief Executive has personally delivered the message across the Council that Senior Managers recognise the impact of change for staff and the importance of providing support through training and regular communication.</p> <p>The Council operates an EAP scheme for all staff which provides 24 hour telephone counselling and face to face counselling sessions where required.</p> <p>The Council has conducted stress and satisfaction surveys of staff from time to time. Unison have also conducted a stress survey of Members in September 2008.</p> <p>A stress policy was adopted in 2008 and a programme of skills training for Managers has been delivered in line with that.</p>