

# Performance Management Framework (Draft)

May 2021



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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 In the current context of financial pressures, rising demand and increasing expectations, it is more important than ever that the Council knows that what we spend and what we do is having an impact on outcomes, and that we 'know and manage our business' effectively, collectively and at service level.
- 1.2 This document sets out the Council's approach to monitoring and managing the performance of the Council's services. The aim of this Performance Management Framework (PMF) is to keep the Council on track and focused on delivery of its key priorities, by providing elected members, managers and staff with the information and tools they need to deliver high-quality and high-performing services which help to achieve good outcomes for residents.
- 1.3 This framework also demonstrates this commitment to our customers, residents, businesses and other stakeholders, helping to meet one of the new Corporate Plan's guiding principles of transparency, stability, accountability and accessibility (see Section 2).

# 2. Scope

- 1.1 In February 2021, the Council introduced its new Corporate Plan 'Creating Tomorrow Together' (2021-2030), setting out its ambitions over the next nine years to make Folkestone & Hythe district an even better place to live, work and visit. The plan is designed to ensure the council focuses its resources on what matters and that our residents can hold us accountable. In the face of challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the plan is also designed to focus on priorities over the next three year period that will help contribute to building a sustainable recovery for the district.
- 1.2 The plan outlines four service ambitions that set out key priority areas for action and six guiding principles that will guide the work we do. Figure one set out on the right provides an overview of how the plan's components link together.

**Figure 1: Corporate Plan 2020-31 Vision, Service Ambitions and Guiding Principles**



2.2 The culture of our organisation is influenced by the style and behaviours staff at all levels adopt. These standards give a clear indication of the behaviours which are expected of staff and underpin our core values. Our core values set out in Figure 2 below strengthen delivery of this performance framework, by encouraging staff to examine their own performance, the performance of their teams and the wider service, and how their work contributes to the overall performance of the organisation.

**Figure 2: Our Core Values**



2.3 Performance management encompasses everything the Council does and it is everyone’s job. This framework applies to all employees. In these times of reducing budgets and increasing demand for Council services, the need for effective performance management has never been greater, as this allows us to:

- Help improve the services and outcomes for our citizens and customers
- Prioritise our goals and allocate our diminishing resources effectively, while identifying opportunities to secure additional resources, particularly working in partnership with other organisations
- Ensure everyone is clear about their role and accountable for delivering the principles and priorities set out in the Corporate Plan.
- Ensure value for money
- Motivate and engage staff
- Work more effectively with other parties, e.g. partners and contractors

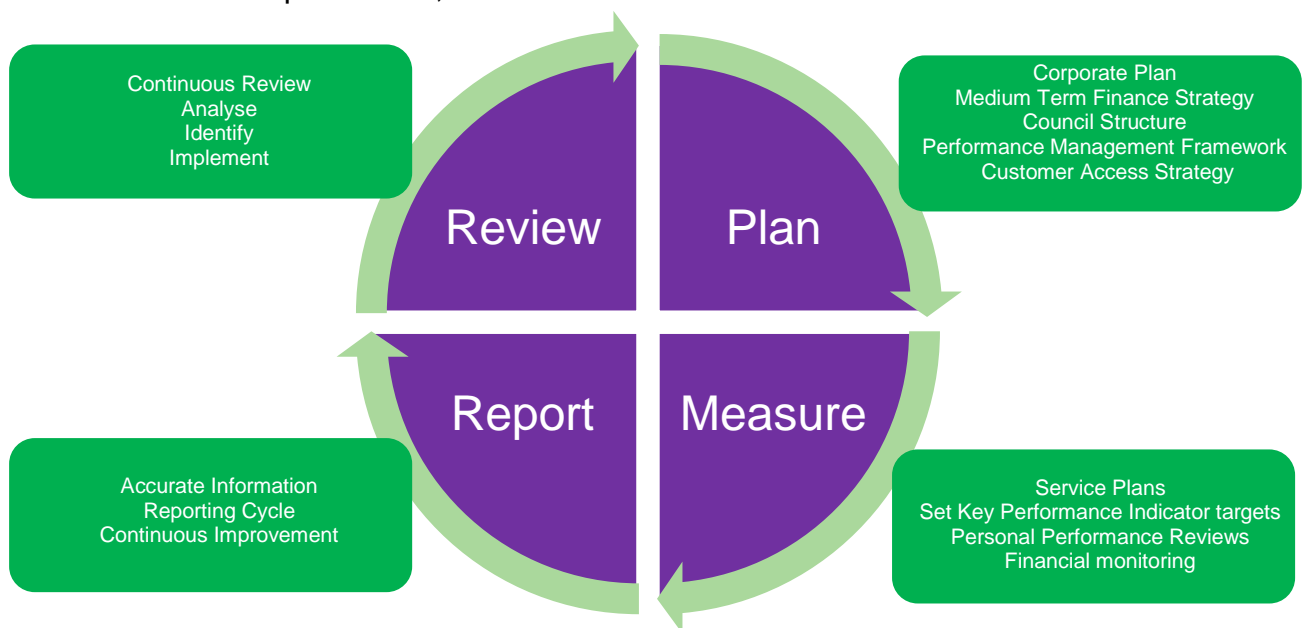
2.4 Effective performance management requires:

- Strong leadership at all levels which is consistent and fair and challenges ‘blame culture’
- Commitment to the accountability that has been assigned to individuals
- The right information reaching the right people at the right time so that decisions are made and actions are taken

- Ongoing evaluation, review and learning to help improve future performance
- The ability to identify and commit to rectify poor performance at an early stage
- An understanding of the difference between data and intelligence, information and analysis
- Comprehensive, but not complicated, intelligence and analysis to inform improvement actions.

### 3. Design

- 3.1 Monitoring performance helps the Council demonstrate that it is making the best use of resources to deliver efficient and effective services to the community.
- 3.2 For the PMF to be effective it must reflect the Council’s priorities and be fully integrated into business and service planning. Put simply, if the Corporate Plan outlines *what* we will deliver, this framework explains *how* we will deliver.
- 3.3 The key elements of performance management draw together work that the Council is already engaged in, in such a way that elected members and senior management can see the progress being made towards achieving the Council’s priorities.
- 3.4 Performance management in the Council comprises the systems, processes, information and governance which enable Councillors, managers and staff to identify, assess, challenge and intervene to address problems with performance. Effective performance management enables and prompts action to be taken to help deliver the Council’s key priorities and the outcomes we want to achieve.
- 3.5 The process, illustrated in the diagram below, is based on a cycle of continuous review and Improvement, which this PMF aims to describe.



# 4. Plan

## 4.1 Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan ‘Creating Tomorrow Together’ 2021-30 sets out the Council’s vision over the next nine years to make Folkestone and Hythe an even better place to live, work and visit. For each of the plan’s four service ambitions, the Council has committed to a number of priorities that it will work towards over the next three years to deliver a sustainable recovery for the district in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 3 below). The Corporate Plan’s vision, service ambitions and priorities have been developed by Members and officers and have been amended through consultation with residents, local groups, partner organisations and other stakeholders.

The priorities set out in the corporate plan will be supported by an action plan that sets out specific high level actions and activities to measure as well as identifies what the council will achieve by the time the plan is comprehensively reviewed in 2024. An annual progress report will be presented to Corporate Leadership Team and Members on delivery against corporate service ambitions, alongside half yearly performance reporting.

**Figure 3: Corporate Plan 2020-31 service ambitions, three year priorities and guiding principles**

### Creating Tomorrow Together: Corporate Plan 2021-30



As well as providing an update on progress, reporting aims to provide senior managers and councillors with key information, in particular with regard to:

- Setting out what future activity is planned to deliver the priorities.
- Being clear about whether the Council will hit, miss or exceed its priorities.
- Highlighting where the Council may fail to meet its priorities and the reasons why.

## 4.2 Medium Term Finance Strategy (MTFS)

The financial management of the organisation is well developed and is well integrated with the wider performance management framework. This is done in the following ways:

- The MTFS is the council's key financial planning document and is closely linked to the Corporate Plan. It outlines the financial perspective on the council's Corporate Plan objectives and priorities. The MTFS is a key element of sound corporate governance and financial management.
- An annual review is undertaken of the MTFS which is agreed by senior management and members.
- There is an annual budget strategy which is approved by Cabinet each year and feeds into the detailed budget approval process. The budget strategy sets out the timetable for preparing the budget, gives an overview of current financial difficulties facing the council and includes proposed actions to help mitigate them. General fund revenue growth and savings are put forward for approval, as part of the budget strategy.
- The annual budget and council tax precept are approved by Full Council in February each year.

## 4.3 Council structure - roles and responsibilities

The structure of the Council supports delivery of the Corporate Plan at every level. Elected members, Corporate Leadership Team and Senior Managers have a key role to play in leading performance management, holding managers and staff to account, and driving improvements in performance.

<b>Elected Members</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Elected members are ultimately accountable to residents for the overall performance of Council services.</li><li>• Cabinet determine the policies, priorities and projects that will be undertaken by Services each year.</li><li>• Portfolio Holders are actively involved in reviewing performance in relation to their portfolio.</li><li>• Each Finance &amp; Performance Sub Committee takes regular reports on performance. Committee Members challenge Lead Members and Officers and may request further in-depth information on specific topics.</li></ul>
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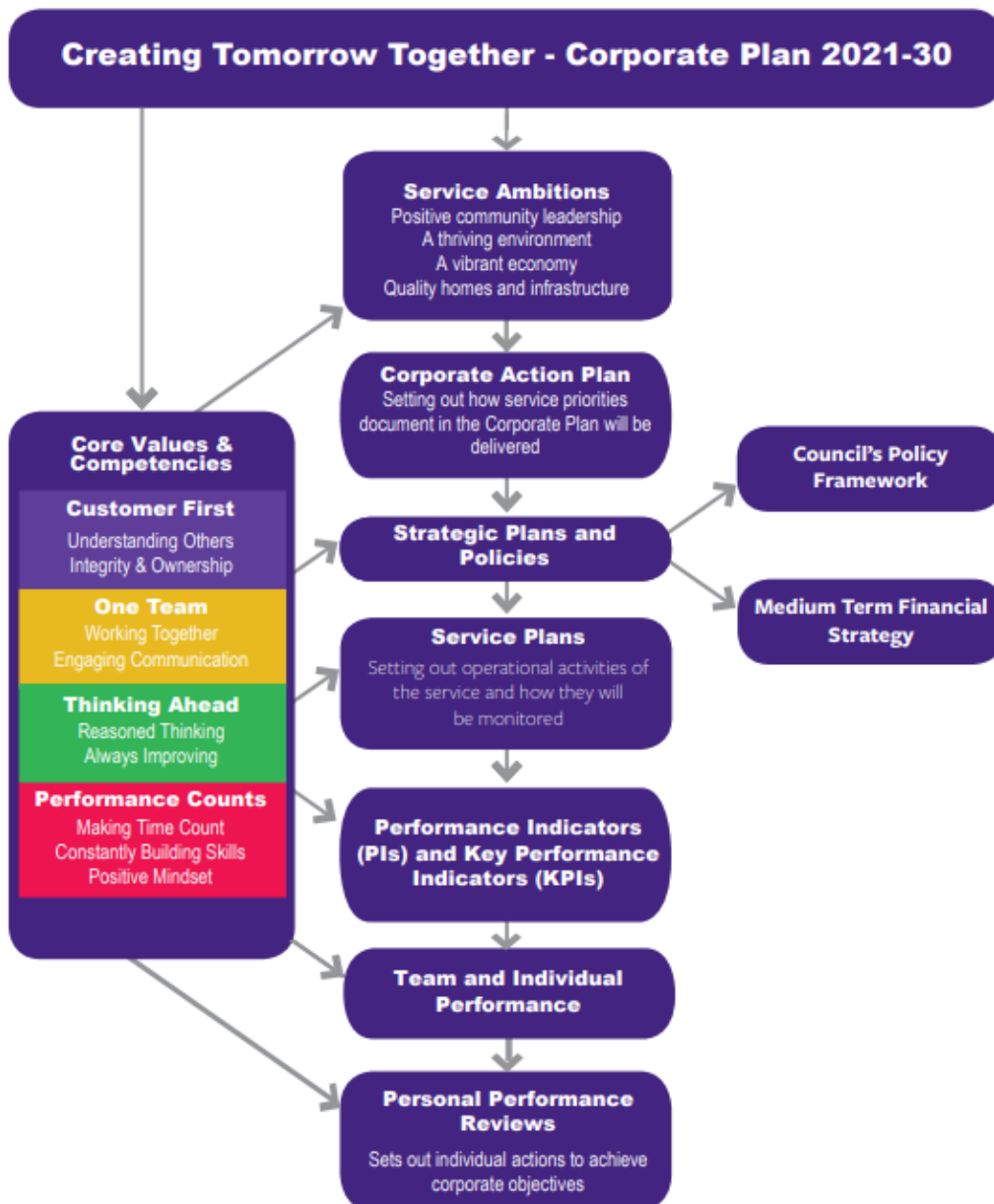
<b>Corporate Leadership Team (CLT)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CLT advise Members regarding the setting of strategic direction and performance priorities.</li> <li>• Approve the Performance Management Framework for the Council and arrangements for implementation.</li> <li>• Receive and consider regular reports on performance of services across the Council against key priorities.</li> <li>• Consider and agree actions and interventions required to address key performance issues.</li> </ul>
<b>Assistant Directors / Chief Officers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistant Directors/Chief Officers set targets and standards for performance within their areas of responsibility in consultation with the Portfolio Lead Member, and identify and manage strategic and operational performance issues and opportunities facing the Council.</li> <li>• Performance is regularly discussed and challenged with Managers and Team Leaders.</li> <li>• Responsibility for ensuring that their Directorate has effective data processes for monitoring performance indicators and ensuring that operational responsibilities for data quality have been delegated to individuals.</li> </ul>
<b>Managers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managers are responsible for the overall operational performance of their service and for the contribution it makes. They are responsible for contributing to the integration of performance management into their area and for ensuring the quality of the data that is recorded and reported within their areas of responsibility.</li> <li>• Where performance targets/standards are not achieved, Managers are required to explain this and provide time bound remedial actions.</li> <li>• Managers are required to provide assurance on the effectiveness of controls in place to mitigate/reduce poor performance in their service and ensure the involvement of staff in setting relevant and appropriate targets through the annual service planning and appraisal process.</li> </ul>
<b>Team Leaders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All levels of staff with managerial responsibility are responsible for the operational performance of their team and for the two-way communication of corporate initiatives and performance issues.</li> <li>• Team Leaders are responsible for ensuring their staff have regular appraisals and review of the training and skills needed to carry out their jobs. They should also ensure that their staff have access to and are familiar with corporate and service area policies and procedures on performance management and data quality.</li> </ul>
<b>Individual staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All staff have a responsibility to manage their own performance. A new competency framework was introduced in 2018 and outlines a set of behaviours which support the Council's Core Values.</li> <li>• Each member of staff will be set specific targets as part of their appraisal each year including review of relevant training / personal development needs. Appraisals are subject to a six month review.</li> <li>• Formal procedures exist to address continual and serious cases of under-performance.</li> </ul>



<b>Residents and the community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local people are able to monitor and review the Council's services performance by accessing published performance information on Council services.</li> <li>Data is publically available providing residents, businesses and the local community the opportunity to hold the Council to account for its performance.</li> </ul>
<b>Corporate contracts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Corporate Contracts team ensure best value in procurement activities and monitor the delivery of the Council contracted services.</li> </ul>
<b>Project Sponsors and Project Managers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For major corporate projects, the Council appoints a senior manager to act as Project Sponsor and an officer to act as Project Manager.</li> <li>The role of the Project Sponsor is to provide strategic direction and resolve major issues as they arise.</li> <li>The Project Sponsor is also accountable for the success of the project.</li> <li>The Project Manager oversees the day to day work on the project including the input of different team members and ensures the appropriate documentation is maintained.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy, Policy and Performance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Strategy, Policy and Performance team provides performance management and data quality within the Council by co-ordinating the corporate approach to performance management and business planning.</li> <li>The team provides support and guidance to Corporate Leadership Team, Assistant Directors, Chief Officers, Managers and Team Leaders in delivering the Performance Management Framework, and on elements such as performance indicators, project tracking, monitoring of achievement against corporate priorities, benchmarking, insight research, statutory returns and inspection requirements.</li> <li>Responsible for reviewing the Council's corporate performance management framework.</li> <li>Ensures corporate performance information is regularly reported to senior management and councillors.</li> <li>Publishes performance reports so the information can be scrutinised by members of the public</li> </ul>

#### **4.4 Performance Management Framework**

To understand how performance management works at the Council, it helps to see how the Council's corporate priorities for the district are cascaded throughout the organisation (see our '**golden thread**' below). Through all the Council's work there is the continuous presence of our core values and staff competencies. These ensure all staff work towards delivering the corporate objectives.



#### 4.5 Customer Access Strategy

The Customer Access Strategy focuses on the ways both internal and external customers' access and transfer information. The strategy takes into consideration customers' feedback to develop and implement plans to improve the way in which the Council delivers and receives day to day information about the services it provides. A key focus of the strategy is to utilise resources effectively to deal with the more complex cases and the more vulnerable customers who need our help. The strategy also sets out the council's principles in delivering customer service for its residents.

The Council manages the performance of its customer service in the following ways:

<p><b>Customer Service Excellence Accreditation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer Service Excellence (CSE) is an accreditation tool to drive customer focused improvement in service delivery. It does this by assessing an organisation’s service delivery to both external and internal customers. The council has retained this accreditation since 2013.</li> <li>• As part of the accreditation all council services have been assessed and have achieved the CSE award and compliance plus for 15 areas. . Each accreditation period is for three years and services are reassessed every 12 months to provide an opportunity for continuous improvement. The CSE Accreditation is due to be reviewed again in September 2021.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Customer Satisfaction</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A number of service areas across the Council monitor customer satisfaction levels. Some particularly customer-focussed services have specific requirements set out in regulation e.g. in Central Government's Social Housing 'White Paper'. Where this is the case, these are reflected in our Corporate Plan.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Customer Feedback and Complaints</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council uses general customer feedback as well as formal complaints to identify areas for improvement. Formal feedback and complaints received by the Council are logged centrally and where relevant appropriate action is taken to address any issues or concerns.</li> <li>• There is a process in place for dealing with formal complaints. The first stage is a local investigation by the manager of the relevant service area; and the second stage is a formal investigation by an independent manager. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response, then at this stage there is the opportunity to take the complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman or Housing Ombudsman Service. The Customer Feedback and Complaints policy is available on the Council’s website.</li> </ul>

## 5. Measure

### 5.1 Service Plans

It is vital that the objectives and priorities in the Corporate Plan are effectively communicated through the organisation. To achieve this each service area develops an annual service plan which includes:

- Service priorities
- Performance Indicators (PIs) that will be monitored to deliver each service priority.

Service plans are reviewed every 6 months to monitor progress against the service priorities.

Service plans are linked to individual work plans and targets through the formal appraisal process. This process relates to all posts in the Council. This assists in ensuring that the achievement of targets by individuals is monitored and appraised regularly.

## **5.2 Set Key Performance Indicator targets**

Being able to measure performance is key to managing performance, as only by devising appropriate measures can we properly monitor progress. The Council has two types of indicators; Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which directly relate to the strategic objectives set out in the Corporate Plan, and Performance Indicators (PIs) which are operational or service specific.

KPI monitoring happens at Corporate Leadership Team, Finance & Performance SubCommittee, Cabinet and at service level where KPIs are devised that will be used to assess achievement, by indicating how a particular objective is progressing towards defined targets.

When determining which indicators to monitor and the target levels of performance required, the Council takes the following into account:

- Impact of service delivery on customers and residents.
- The state of the economy and likely impact on demand for services.
- The Corporate Plan, strategic direction and matters arising from its review.

Targets can take many forms; they may be statistical such as a specific number, value or weight, have a clear time frame or completion date, or relate to a recognised industry standard of excellence, Government guidance or legislative requirement.

Most importantly, the target must be both relevant to the indicator being measured and achievable. Targets set too high will result in apparent under-performance, whilst targets set too low undermine the monitoring process. Historical data may be of use to benchmark against for future results, but only in the context of the current environment. Last year's results are not necessarily any guide to future outputs.

## **5.3 Personal Performance Reviews**

An important part of the Council's Performance Management Framework is people management – attracting and developing staff with the right skills, knowledge and core competencies to deliver excellent services.

Personal Performance Reviews (PPRs) assist in ensuring that the achievement of targets by individuals is monitored and appraised regularly. The process incorporates:

- Achievements since the last PPR and comment on the extent to which the targets set have been achieved.
- A review of the skills, knowledge and experience required to do the job and the performance achieved in each of these areas. This should include reference to work quality, work quantity, interpersonal skills and

communication skills. This will assist in addressing any gaps in job knowledge that may be affecting performance.

- Competency and the way in which tasks and objectives are achieved.
- The training, learning and development needed to support progress.
- Priorities and goals for the next 12 months should be set out in an action plan, which should be reviewed every 6 months to ensure it is still relevant.

The activity and performance of individuals should be frequently reviewed with informal 1-2-1's with their line managers. This is an opportunity to discuss the work programme for the individual and address any concerns.

Excellent or poor performance within the organisation is identified and addressed in the following ways:

- Poor performance will be dealt with either by learning and development interventions, capability reviews or the disciplinary process.
- Excellent performance is recognised through the council's system of honorariums, accelerated progression through the salary scale or through the FHDC Recognition Scheme.

## 5.4 Financial Monitoring

The financial management of the organisation is well developed and is well integrated with the wider performance management framework. This is done in the following ways:

<p><b>Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The MTFS is the council's key financial planning document and is closely linked to the Corporate Plan. It outlines the financial perspective on the council's Corporate Plan objectives and priorities. The MTFS is a key element of sound corporate governance and financial management.</li> <li>• An annual review is undertaken of the MTFS which is agreed by senior management and members.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Annual budget setting process</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is an annual budget strategy which is approved by Cabinet each year, this feeds into the detailed budget approval process. The budget strategy sets out the timetable for preparing the budget, gives an overview of current financial issues facing the council each year and includes proposed actions to help mitigate them. General fund revenue growth and savings are put forward for approval, as part of the budget strategy.</li> <li>• The annual budget and council tax precept are approved by Full Council in February.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Quarterly monitoring and reporting</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget managers provide a monthly or quarterly forecast and they are responsible for ensuring that spending is on track and identifying potential savings.</li> <li>• CLT and Cabinet receive regular updates on the Council budget and challenge areas with significant level of anticipated under or overspend.</li> </ul>

## **6. Report**

### **6.1 Accurate Information**

Councillors and senior management need performance information in order to:

- Tailor service provision to community needs
- Identify and address areas of concern
- Demonstrate improving value for money

The performance information reported must therefore be accurate. Equally, the best selection of performance measures is of little use if monitoring data is unreliable or not reported effectively. These factors are therefore crucial when reporting performance information:

- Constructing valid measures or KPIs
- Producing high quality data
- Reporting information in context
- Presenting information with insight and commentary

### **6.2 Reporting Cycle**

The Council manages its performance on a regular basis to ensure continuous review and improvement. Performance information is collated into a report and reviewed on either a quarterly or half yearly basis alongside comparative performance information appropriate to the reporting period, in order to show performance progression and identify any improvements needed. Performance information is reported to the Corporate Leadership Team, Finance & Performance Sub Committee and Cabinet to ensure progress is continuously monitored and reported at every level of Council.

### **6.3 Continuous Improvement**

Continuous improvement depends on staff at every level and in every department being fully engaged in the performance management process. This has been an important element of the Council-wide 'transformation' programme and has the added benefit of demonstrating to staff that the work that they do is important and valued.

It is the responsibility of the Service Manager to actively liaise with their teams regularly on all aspects of performance to ensure upward reporting is accurate. It also ensures the information and subsequent outcomes are properly cascaded to the front line staff whose job it is to deliver the services.

This circular approach is applied to all Council services including those which provide internal assistance to the Council itself such as Legal, ICT and HR. The work these departments undertake is equally important to the authority's success since without such effective internal mechanisms the outward facing customer-focused areas could not deliver essential community services.



# 7. Review

## 7.1 Continuous Review

This framework has been designed to ensure continuous review of performance at service level, through sequential upward reporting to senior management and Elected Members.

## 7.2 Analyse

Analysing of information provided in performance reports raises awareness to emerging issues and developing conditions, allowing forward planning to correct areas of weak performance.

It also enables management to properly target resources. Total resource needs, including staff, are never likely to be available. However, with regular performance monitoring resources that are available can be directed where they are most needed in order to maximise goal achievement.

## 7.3 Identify

Elected Members and officers rely upon good-quality performance information in order to identify areas of concern and respond through well-informed decisions. It would be impossible for the Council to properly function without knowing which areas need the most focus and support.

Once identified, areas of concern can be properly addressed in the most appropriate way in order to keep progress on track to meet the Council's aims. Performance information must therefore be accurate, timely and meaningful.

## 7.4 Implement

Having a highly developed PMF is not an end in itself. To be successful decision-makers take action based on what the performance information is telling them. The true value of a performance management process is generated by implementing its outcomes. For continuous improvement to occur the performance information reported must be acted upon in order to remedy poor performance, share good practice and allocate resources most effectively.

To assist with this, improvement plans will be developed where appropriate, with corresponding action plans to ensure these are delivered. Improvement plans need to clearly distinguish:

- The issues
- The action to be taken
- The timescales
- The resources required to implement the actions
- How progress will be monitored and by whom
- What the measure of success will be

The performance information gathered, revisions made, resources employed, targets set and outcomes accomplished through this process also inform future

Council aims and objectives. In this way, the Council is able to improve on past years and embed those improvements into the future work it undertakes.

## 8. Working with other organisations

8.1 Not all of the Council's services are delivered by staff directly employed by the organisation. The Council also works with other organisations to deliver its services and corporate priorities. These third party arrangements can be:

<p><b>Contracted services</b> – <i>services where there is a contractual agreement with a third party supplier.</i></p>	<p>Contracts are managed by the responsible services in line with the council's Contract Standing Orders. The Corporate Contracts Manager manages the Council's major contracts by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regularly liaising with the contractors and having an appointed specialist officer who leads on monitoring the delivery of the contract.</li> <li>• Linking the monitoring of contracts closely to the performance standards set out in the contract.</li> <li>• Ensuring the governance arrangements set up in the contracts are observed (e.g. project boards and service level agreements) and these arrangements provide a robust mechanism to address areas of concern.</li> <li>• Regularly reporting on high profile council contracts (e.g. waste management) to CLT and members.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Shared services and other commissioned services</b> – <i>services which are commissioned through a service level agreement, rather than a formal contract. This can include arrangements with community and voluntary sector organisations.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council's shared service arrangements are the responsibility of the relevant Assistant Director or Chief Officer. Shared service arrangements are usually managed through service level agreements and often incorporate Key Performance Indicators with which to judge the level of performance being delivered.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Partnerships</b> – <i>services that are delivered by partners (including the Council) coming together to work towards mutual aims. These partnerships usually have a set of governing documents, which include stated aims, objectives and terms of reference.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council manages the performance of its strategic partnerships through its Partnership Policy overseen by the Corporate Contracts Manager. Within the policy, Corporate Partnerships are defined where they meet one or both of the following criteria:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Council has a statutory duty to be involved in the partnership.</i></li> <li>• <i>The Council makes a financial contribution (£5,000 or more) towards the partnership.</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• A partnership checklist must be completed by the lead officer and/or elected member. The checklist provides the key elements that all partnerships need to work to or have in place to enable the Council to determine if the partnership is one it wishes to enter or continue with. This policy does not apply to the Council's relationship with third party service providers or the wide range of organisations with which the Council has informal working relations, as part of its operational activities.</li> </ul>

- The Council publishes its Partnership Register online, providing details of joint initiatives the Council. This is maintained and administered by the Contract and Procurement Team.

## 9. Risk Management

9.1 The Council's Risk Management Policy effectively manages risk across the organisation and is an important part of performance management. By ensuring that the Council routinely identifies and mitigates risks across the organisation, it can ensure that the Council performs well and succeeds in delivering its strategic objectives.

The Council's Risk Management Policy identifies two categories of risk that the Council manages which will impact service performance:

- **Corporate risks** – these are risks that need to be taken into account when looking at the medium to long-term objectives of the Council as highlighted in the Corporate Plan. Risks are categorised as political, economic, social, technological, legislative, environmental, competitive, customer/citizen or reputation.
- **Operational/service risks** – these are risks that managers and staff will encounter in day to day operations. They are categorised as professional, financial, legal, physical, contractual, technological, environmental and human resources.

The Council use two types of risk register:

- **Corporate Risk Register** – this contains the most significant risks to the Council and is reported to CLT and Elected Members periodically.
- **Operational Risk Register** – this records the day to day risks for each Council service.

## 10. Open Data and Transparency

10.1 The Council recognises and supports the importance of making performance data available to the public as a means of ensuring the effective scrutiny of the performance of the organisation. This is reflected in the Corporate Plan's guiding principle of 'Transparent, stable, accountable and accessible'.

### Data Quality Strategy

The Council's Data Quality Strategy (Appendix 2) outlines the approach to improving data quality across the Council and provides a co-ordinated approach to ensure that the highest standards are being met.

The strategy outlines the steps necessary to maintain the highest possible standards throughout the data collection process, from inputting data into individual information systems, to setting up performance indicators and transferring data from the information systems into the performance management software system, to the publication of a robust set of performance data that is accurate and fit for external scrutiny.

**May 2021**  
Next review date: **May 2025**

**Appendix 2:**

**Folkestone & Hythe District Council**

**Data Quality Strategy**



## Introduction

The purpose of this strategy is to outline an approach to improving data quality across Folkestone and Hythe District Council and provide a co-ordinated approach to ensure that the highest standards are being met throughout the Council. Consistent, high-quality, timely and comprehensive information is vital to support good decision-making and improved service outcomes.

This strategy outlines the steps necessary to maintain the highest possible standards throughout the data collection process, from inputting data into individual information systems, to setting up performance indicators and transferring data from the information systems into the performance management software system, to the publication of a robust set of performance data that is accurate and fit for external scrutiny. This strategy is endorsed by senior management and it is made clear to all Service Managers concerning the ownership and responsibilities for accurate data input.

There are a number of principles that underpin good data quality. These are:

1. **Awareness and Ownership** – Everyone recognises the need for good data quality and how they can contribute. Officers are aware of their responsibilities for data quality within their service areas.
2. **Systems** – Systems are fit for purpose and staff have the expertise to get the best out of them. Systems are robust to ensure that data is backed-up and that there are no breaches of personal data. The council has adopted the Pentana software system for performance management.
3. **Definitions** – Everyone knows which performance indicators are produced from the information they input and how they are defined.
4. **Input** - Data inputted into information systems and the performance management software system is accurate.
5. **Verification** – There are verification procedures in place as close to the point of input as possible to allow officers to authenticate with confidence.
6. **Output** – Performance information is monitored regularly and efficiently for reporting and communicated quickly.
7. **Presentation** – Performance information is presented (with evidence) in such a way as to give an accurate picture of our performance to external auditors, Members, Senior Management and the public.



## 1. Awareness and Ownership

- 1.1 Data quality is the responsibility of every member of staff entering, verifying extracting or analysing data from any of the council's information systems and corporate performance management software system. Service Managers are clear about what actions and responsibilities are allocated to specific individuals and teams. Relevant officers are aware of their responsibilities with regard to data quality.
- 1.2 Responsibility for data quality is, where directly relevant, reflected in job profiles and the appraisal process. Services are encouraged to ensure that, where directly relevant, suitable appraisal targets are included.
- 1.3 The commitment to data quality is communicated clearly throughout the council.

## 2. Systems

- 2.1 **System Administration:** Responsibility for maintaining a robust control environment for information systems (both IT and manual) lies within individual services. The responsibility for Pentana lies with the Performance and Improvement Specialist.

The Performance and Improvement Specialist will ensure (for the corporate performance management software system) that:

- Users are adequately trained by having a formal training programme, which is periodically evaluated and adapted to respond to changing needs.
- There is security of access/amendment.
- Periodic tests of the integrity of data are undertaken.
- Information management and support is available to users.
- The system meets managers' information needs.
- Feedback from users is acted upon and the system can produce adequate audit trails.
- Actions recommended by systems reviews (e.g. by the external auditors) are implemented.

Given the increasingly demanding timescale for performance reporting, services must have procedures in place to manage both planned and unplanned absence in order to minimise missing data or late data submission.

- 2.2 **Improvement of system:** Where a system is used to produce performance data, the system administrators will need to periodically review the system to ensure it is fit for purpose. It is the responsibility of each service to evaluate the system and to identify any system weaknesses and/or gaps.

If such weaknesses exist, new systems and procedures can be designed, addressing any part of the performance information production process. This might involve a new verification procedure, new input controls, or improved training and communication, amongst many other things.

It is important that the necessary improvement measures are formulated in an action plan, and that progress against the plan is systematically monitored.

### **3. Definitions**

- 3.1 Where performance indicators are set, clear definitions are established and there are systems available to collect and report the data in an agreed format. This ensures that data is recorded consistently, allowing for comparison over time.
- 3.2 The Performance and Improvement Specialist is responsible for verifying and inputting all data submitted through Pentana. Each officer is aware of the latest definition and any recent changes that have taken place by checking the information within the performance management system.
- 3.3 All officers know how their day-to-day job contributes to the calculation of performance and our ability to manage performance effectively.
- 3.4 All officers have an understanding of how performance indicators are affected by the data they contribute.

### **4. Input**

- 4.1 System-produced figures are only as good as the data input into the system in the first place and there needs to be adequate controls over the input of data. The aim is 100% accuracy 100% of the time. Officers have clear guidelines and procedures for using systems and are properly trained to ensure that information is being entered consistently and correctly.
- 4.2 The system has the ability to record all relevant information and be able to identify any missing data and determine whether additional controls are necessary.
- 4.3 All officers are responsible for seeking ways to minimise the manual handling and inputting of data in order to reduce the opportunities for error.

### **5. Verification**

- 5.1 Even in complex systems, where there are strong controls over input, errors can creep in. Where it is needed, a verification procedure exists close to the point of data input. The frequency of verification checks is aligned with the frequency of data reporting.
- 5.2 When data is provided on a regular basis by external sources it is important to ensure that the data that they provide is accurate. When entering into contracts or service level agreements with other service providers it is essential that, wherever relevant, there is a requirement to provide timely and accurate performance information as well as an up to date Data Quality Strategy, which outlines the verification processes that data produced by that organisation would have been subjected to.
- 5.3 Responsibility for data verification will lie within individual service areas. The Performance and Improvement Specialist can offer advice and guidance about verification procedures. In some cases, it might become apparent that existing procedures are not sufficient to maintain a robust control environment.

## **6. Output**

- 6.1 Performance information is to be produced and communicated on a timetable that allows for management action. This means the provision of information is in line with the annual reporting timetable. Services need, therefore, to re-examine internal processes to ensure that they are always able to obtain output data in the shortest possible time without compromising data quality.
- 6.2 It is important that performance information is subject to scrutiny and challenge. This is done during the verification check on output reports or at a service or team meeting to discuss performance data. There must also be close internal scrutiny of externally audited data submissions by reviewers within individual services and centrally by the Strategy, Policy and Performance Team.

## **7. Presentations**

- 7.1 Reporting accurate information regularly leads to good decision making and improved performance. The Performance and Improvement Specialist will ensure that there are processes in place for stakeholders to have confidence in the information presented.
- 7.2 It is intended that external auditors will have no cause to make amendments to any of the council's performance figures as the data can be relied upon to be accurate. This is an important issue as it sends out a message to external stakeholders that the reported performance can be relied upon. An improvement in the quality of the submission will also result in a lower level of external audit scrutiny.
- 7.3 In order to ensure that audit work proceeds smoothly, during internal/external audits, there must be at least one officer within each service who is able to provide advice and information on that service's performance indicators. When information is presented for audit the working papers must be reviewed to confirm that the definition has been followed, the calculations are correct and the indicator is supported by a full audit trail.
- 7.4 The principles of fair and robust reporting outlined in this document apply equally to all the council's performance information.

**May 2021**  
Next review date: **May 2025**