

Appendix 1.1

AGS 2022-23 Action Plan Spreadsheet Additional Information

Action 1. Financial Management

Status Update from 2022/23 Additional Information

External Auditors Section 24 statutory recommendations:

"Finalise the root and branch review of financial management in all service departments and in respect of corporate decisions as part of the Opening the Books exercise". An update on progress against the 76 recommendations from the Opening the Books external review was taken to Audit and Governance Committee on 30/11/23 through the "Revenue and Capital Monitoring Improvements" report. This showed 40 recommendations as being complete, 9 as underway and 27 to be progressed. A further update to A&G Committee is planned for April 2024.

"Resolve the accounting arrangements in respect of Croydon Affordable Homes". This has been completed and agreed with the auditors for the 2019-20 final accounts which are planned to be taken to A&G Committee in February 2024.

"Invest significant extra resource (when possible) in finance capacity, internal audit and risk management to ensure robust processes are brought into place to monitor progress and meet statutory financial obligations". The Director of Finance (Deputy S151) completed the restructure consultation for the Strategic Finance service area in October 2023. A growth bid of £0.5m is being considered as part of the Council's 2024-25 budget setting process to improve capacity and skills levels in the Strategic Finance structure. Capacity in Internal Audit and Risk Management was increased in 2022-23.

"Demonstrate clearly to Council tax payers how the additional Council tax for 2023/24 has been properly controlled and demonstrates improvements in value for money arrangements". It was agreed with Grant Thornton to detail this in a report by June 2024. The monthly financial performance reports include the list of transformation projects and their budget allocations.

"Develop an action plan to clear the three outstanding years of accounts and audit by June 2024". The 2019-20 interim audit findings report was taken to A&G Committee on 30/11/23. The final 2019-20 accounts are planned to be taken to A&G Committee on 1/2/24. The expected completion for 2020-21 is April 2024 and for 2021-22 is September 2024.

"Develop and enhance governance process for all key investment decisions and develop a Panel to address the accounting implication of all capital investments". This recommendation is aligned to the Capital Framework Improvement Plan from PwC. An update on progress against the 9 recommendations from this plan was taken to A&G Committee on 30/11/23 which showed 7 as underway and 2 to be progressed. A further update to A&G Committee is planned for April 2024.

"Enhance existing officer control activities by ensuring the Scrutiny and Governance Committee robustly challenges the monthly budgets report from officers from a governance and control perspective". Implemented. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee receives and challenges the monthly financial performance reports and uses its subcommittees to deep dive into financial performance of service directorates.

"Ensure that the lessons learned from the former CEO's termination payments, as set out to Full Council in 2022 and set out in detail below, are applied to all future Chief Officer severance payments". Implemented. The requirement of Statutory Guidance on Special Severance Payment is being adhered to. There have been changes made to the Pay Policy Statement to make it clear that Special Severance Payments and severance packages of £100,000 and above should be approved by a vote of full Council. However, if the proposals are being made in the context of litigation and the making of the decision is urgent, General Purposes Committee (GPC) can approve such payments in accordance with the Council's constitution. Decisions will only be referred to the GPC for approval in limited and exceptional cases, where a decision is required urgently in the context of litigation. A robust written business case setting out the considerations for making a Special Severance Payment, along with appropriate written professional legal and financial advice, must be provided where approval for a Special Severance Payment is sought. In line with Statutory Guidance any settlement agreement between £20,000 and up to £100,000 has to be approved by the Executive Mayor and Chief Executive, with a full written business case demonstrating good value to the taxpayer, A settlement below £20,000 has the same requirements, approved by the Chief People Officer.

"That proper records are kept of any conversations, discussions, or meetings of any potential settlement agreements with an employee." Implemented. Records are kept within the written business case to demonstrate the legal and financial best value case. Where members are involved in the decision-making process, a full written note will be taken and retained by Democratic Services.

"That reasonable enquiries are made to establish all the facts, events, and circumstances that give rise to any proposed settlement agreement, including any wrongdoing by the parties involved". Implemented. Appropriate legal and financial advice is taken and recorded to ensure all facts and events are considered as part of the best value written business case.

"That legal advice is sought on merits and chances of success of any potential claim against the Council and quantum of damages awarded. This should inform the decision on any potential settlement payment". Implemented. As above, legal advice is sought and captured in the written business case to ensure best value for the taxpayer is satisfied.

"There is compliance with the governance arrangements relating to the decision-making on settlement payments". Implemented. Addressed through the Pay Policy statement 2023/4 which sets out clearly the governance arrangements and compliance with the Statutory Guidance for Special Severance Payments.

"That officers and members who are the subject of the dispute are not involved in the decision-making relating to the proposed settlement agreement". Implemented. Addressed in the Pay Policy Statement 2023/4.

"That Democratic Services attend both the open and exempt part of any committee meeting for approval of settlement payments. That proper minutes of the meeting are taken so that there is an understanding of the reasons for the decision and the deliberation by the committee". Implemented. Addressed in the Pay Policy Statement and in all meeting practice.

External Auditors Interim Report for the financial year 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 recommendations:

"With three Section 114 notices having been issued in two years, and the Council having made it clear that extraordinary government support is required to return to financial sustainability, it will be important that the Council maintains discipline over its own savings and transformation plans. For savings plans, Internal Audit recommendations for improvement in Star Chamber processes should be implemented as a matter of priority. Plans that are realistic should be approved. For transformation projects, arrangements should be put in place for tracking and challenging outcomes before any further funding is approved." Implemented. Proposed savings plans were discussed in Star Chambers in July and September 2023 and realistic savings were approved to be put forward to Full Council in February 2024. A permanent Director of Transformation has been recruited to support tracking and challenging of outcomes for transformation projects. The approved list of transformation projects and their budget allocations are included in the monthly financial performance reports.

"The Council should continue to focus on resolving Internal Audit recommendations, including from 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22." This work is ongoing and prioritised, with the Corporate Management Team (CMT) holding internal audit focus meetings to monitor progress.

"The Council should continually review arrangements for overseeing standards and codes of conduct. The Ethics Committee, in overseeing standards, should be mindful that the substance of cultural behaviour is as critical as the procedural form". Agreed and ongoing. The Council has undertaken a review of its arrangements and is satisfied that it is fit for its purpose. See report to the Ethics Committee meeting on 15th November 2023 at pages 27 - 33.

"Regular engagement with residents should continue. The Council's goal should be to improve upon a performance where 36% of its respondents described their experience with the Council as poor or very poor. As the housing contracts are re-procured or insourced, they should be sense checked for lessons learnt from engagement with the previous contractor. Working with partners is more effective where there are shared goals, clear roles and responsibilities, performance metrics that are monitored, and a forward-looking view". Agreed. The three new repairs and maintenance contracts let in summer 2023 are demonstrating good progress in dealing with the repairs and maintenance backlog.

"The Council should continue the work started to strengthen governance over procurement. This will be particularly important as the Council prepares for new procurement legislation and a transition period of six months in 2023, when two different sets of regulations are expected to be in force at the same time. Internal Audit findings around contract letting, monitoring and management arrangements between 2019-20 and 2021-22 should be actioned at the earliest opportunity". Agreed. This is being taken forward as part of the procurement and contract management improvement plan.

Action 7. Information Management

Status Update from 2022/23: Additional Information

Publication Scheme - The Council continues to review and update our processes in line with responsibilities set out in the Information Commissioner's Office Model Publication Scheme. This is ensuring that all information required to be in the public domain is published. Croydon remains compliant. We continue to proactively publish key information including:

- Who we are and what we do
- What we spend and how we spend it
- What our priorities are and how we are doing
- How we make decisions
- Our policies and procedures
- Lists and registers
- The services we offer.

Subject Access Requests (SAR) - A detailed SAR improvement plan was developed and shared with the ICO. This has led to significant progress in the Council's performance, a reduced backlog of requests and a big improvement in our compliance rate. The Council is no longer required to attend quarterly compliance meetings or share our monthly statistics with the ICO.

Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests -Croydon was subject to an Enforcement Notice issued by the ICO in June 2023. This was due to a backlog of overdue FOI requests and the notice required that we improve our compliance rate and close all requests in our backlog, as of June 2023.

Working closely with the ICO, a detailed FOI improvement plan was developed and significant changes to our processes followed. With the continued support of the Corporate Management Team the Council has seen great improvement in FOI response timeframes. We are now hitting the 90% compliance rate, which means responding to the request within 20 working days. The backlog now consists of 4 and we expect these to be closed soon. The ICO will review the Enforcement Notice in the second week of February, and we expect to no longer be to subject to it.

We continue to publish our previous FOI responses in a disclosure log on the Council's public-facing website.

Resources - As part of the improvement plans for both SAR and FOI, additional human resources have been deployed. Within the Central Information Management Team three roles have been appointed:

- A dedicated full-time Data Protection Officer
- An additional full-time SAR / FOI Officer
- A full-time Admin Support Officer

Within the Children, Young People & Education Directorate

- One secondment of a full-time SAR Officer
- A full-time Admin Support Officer

Within Housing Directorate

- An additional full-time shared resource, coordinating responses.

Data Protection, GDPR Training - There is a mandatory e-Learning training module for all Council staff to complete online. This training is for all new staff starting with the Council and all staff are required to do yearly refresher training. This training has been refreshed as of January 2024. The Croydon learning team are now able to capture statistics and send out reminders to staff.

A more in-depth face-to-face training sessions, held virtually on MS Teams, are available via Croydon learning for up to 40 attendees. These are held monthly and advertised on the intranet and via the Chief Executive's news bulletins. In line with the ICO's recommendation, these sessions are an opportunity for staff to engage with the team and for staff to ask for more service specific guidance. This training is continually being revised to include examples of previous Data Breaches, remedies and changes to processes as required.

Going forward, there is a plan to make it mandatory for staff, and their line-manager, who have been involved in a Data Breach, to complete the e-Learning training again and a recommendation to attend the in-depth face-to-face session.

Freedom of Information Training - The FOI improvement plan led to the team creating new FOI & EIR training. This training details the background to the legislation, key obligations of the Council and all relevant exemptions & exceptions. It has been delivered to all key stakeholders and has been added to Croydon's e-Learning portal. Going forward, we will recommend that e-Learning training be made mandatory for all Team Managers and other key staff.

Reporting - Weekly SAR / FOI reports sent to the whole organisation highlighting all open and overdue cases per directorate. Colleagues can view the report and advise on any closures or responses due. Regular updates on FOI, SARs and Data Breaches are reported to the Corporate Management Team and the Information Management Internal Control Board.

Governance - The Data Protection Officer and Chief Digital Officer are both members of the Council's Statutory Officers' Meeting, chaired the Chief Executive. This meeting gives us the opportunity to raise and address key concerns.

There is a monthly Information Management Internal Control Board meeting to discuss the Council's Information Governance arrangements, chaired by the Council's Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer. This meeting allows the Information Management Team to raise and discuss on-going issues and improvements with key stakeholders. From this meeting serious risks can be escalated to the Corporate Management Team.

Policies/procedures - A new freedom of information policy has now been published on the Council's public facing website. We are currently involved in reviewing all the Council's Information Security and Information Management Policies. These policies will be ratified at the Information Management Internal Control Board. For more details on added or amended procedures please refer to the FOI/SAR improvement plans, linked above.