

Leading good governance and assurance

LGA Webinar, 2nd December 2025, 2pm – 4pm

Welcome from

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Virtual workshop protocols

- Paper and pen to hand for taking notes
 - Please close other applications if you are struggling with connection (e.g. outlook, mail, social media etc.)
 - There is no recording
 - Please keep the mute button on throughout
 - Chat function for comments and questions
 - A copy of the PowerPoint slides will be uploaded on the LGA website after the session
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Welcome

The purpose of the webinar is to focus on the key role members play in shaping an effective governance and assurance culture and systems.

We aim to increase your understanding of governance and assurance and provide you with the confidence and tools to be a proactive member leader in governance and assurance.

Our Programme

- Welcome and introductions
 - What is governance and assurance?
 - Why is governance and assurance important?
 - Good governance and assurance: the how
 - What does good governance & assurance look like?
 - Councillor leadership of governance and assurance
 - Assurance
 - Powerful Questions & other useful tools
 - Useful resources & LGA Support
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WHAT IS GOVERNANCE AND ASSURANCE?

In your council how aware and knowledgeable are councillors about governance and assurance?

Choose one option:

- There is an excellent understanding of governance and assurance
 - There is a good level of understanding of governance and assurance
 - There is a low level of understanding of governance and assurance
 - Very few councillors have an understanding of governance and assurance
 - There is no understanding of governance and assurance
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Governance....

‘Comprises the arrangements (including political, economic, social, environmental, administrative, legal and other arrangements) put in place to ensure that the intended outcomes for stakeholders are defined and achieved’.

CIPFA/Solace Delivering Good Governance in Local
Government: Framework, 2016

The Nolan Principles: 7 Principles of Public Life

Selflessness	To act solely in terms of public interest
Integrity	To declare & resolve conflicts of interest. To not act or take decisions to gain financial or other benefits. To not be influenced by obligations to people or organisations
Objectivity	To act & take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence & without discrimination or bias
Accountability	To be accountable to the public for their decisions & actions and to submit themselves to necessary scrutiny
Openness	To act and take decisions in an open & transparent manner
Honesty	To be truthful
Leadership	To exhibit the above principles in their own behaviour. To actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour

Assurance...

‘Information, evidence and evaluation of how local authorities are delivering their duties, functions and outcomes, which can be used to hold them to account and may give confidence. There should be no assumption that assurance will always be gained – in some cases the outcome will be “not assured”’

LGA, Governance & Assurance Framework, 2024

How high a priority would your fellow councillors say good governance and assurance has in your authority?

Choose one:

- Very high priority
 - High priority
 - Medium level priority
 - Low level priority
 - Not a priority
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WHY DO COUNCILS FAIL?

THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE & ASSURANCE

So, why do councils fail?

What factors or circumstances contribute to a council failing as an organisation?

Please put your answers in the chat.

Why councils fail or get into difficulty

Leadership

- absence of clear or consistent vision
- being too brave / not brave enough
- no or little focus on Best Value / Value for Money

Accountability

- failed commercial endeavours
- poor financial accountability
- breakdown in basic financial (and other) controls

Information / planning

- over optimistic plans / savings
- robustness of the Medium-Term Finance Plan
- poor performance / activity data / financial information

Governance

- weak audit committee / Overview & Scrutiny
- quality / capacity of key staff

Culture

- truth to power / transparency / speaking up
 - leaders not leading by example
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What can we learn from these failures?

- **All point to fundamental things that good governance supported by effective assurance can / should prevent!**
 - **All are within a council's control and influence**
 - **And of course, members and officers have a role in ensuring these things don't happen**
 - **It is those charged with governance, full council that are ultimately responsible**

 - **Which brings us to risk management and assurance**
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Risks and Assurance

...as risks increase so should assurance systems...

‘Areas where there is greater risk and where control failure could have a significant impact should be identified by the authority as in need of greater assurance. These include IT security, financial management and strategic areas that underpin operations. Other examples include safety and safeguarding. Areas such as these typically have a low-risk appetite but a high assurance appetite’

Developing an Effective Assurance Framework in a Local Authority, CIPFA, 2023

Importance of good governance & assurance

- It has ***always*** been important – accountability, openness, inclusiveness, value for money are key to democratic institutions
 - Contemporary changes in local government have increased the significance of work in this area:
 - Acute financial pressures
 - Advances in partnership working and collaboration
 - Partnerships with the private sector, other public agencies & the third & community sectors
 - Shared services
 - Shared chief executives and management teams
 - Number of examples of where governance has failed coupled with the absence of effective ‘scrutiny’ and assurance
-

Importance of good governance & assurance... the longer version...

Why is good governance and assurance important to leading (and all) councillors?

- To encourage challenge and different views within the council
 - To mitigate against possible service or governance failures
 - To ensure a healthy local democracy
 - To avoid negative local or national press
 - To be assured that finances are sound and resources are well managed
 - To demonstrate that the council is delivering its vision and corporate priorities
 - To avoid poor inspection results
 - To avoid external controls and commissioners being sent into the council
 - To ensure clear accountability systems and processes
 - To deliver good governance and assurance over complex partnership arrangements or arms lengths ventures
 - To provide an account to the public and users of services
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YOUR Key Challenges

What key governance and assurance challenges do you face in your council?

These can be challenges that are current, that you have overcome or that you are concerned might develop in the near future.

Please put your answers in the chat.

GOVERNANCE AND ASSURANCE: THE HOW

Key bodies / committees

- Full council
- Executive or Policy and Resources Committee
- Overview and Scrutiny committees
- Audit Committee
- Standards Committee
- Committee with delegated responsibility for governance

Each of these bodies / committees has their specific role in governance and assurance

Who are 'those charged with governance'?

Simplified Political Management System – Majority control council

DMTs
Directorate
management
teams

SMT
Senior
Management
Team

**Full
Council**

**Outside
bodies/
Partners**
e.g. Combined
authority, NHS,
housing, police

**Cabinet
Member
briefings**

Cabinet
Including
Resources
cabinet
member

Planning

Licensing

**Informal
cabinet**

**Audit &
Governance**

**Overview &
Scrutiny**

**Party
Groups**

- 1. How well does each part of the system undertake its role in governance & assurance?*
- 2. How does it connect up as a system?*

Good practice examples

Essex County Council has a multi-layered, council-wide approach to governance and assurance

- Councillor governance infrastructure is provided by: Corporate Governance Steering Board, Audit Governance and Standards Committee, Constitution Working Group and Finance Oversight Board
- There is a focus on the quality of report-writing, transparency and trust between members and officers, sustained by a culture of continual learning and development

[Case study](#)

Governance & Assurance: Key organisational components

- **‘Golden triangle’** - Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer and S.151 officer
- Corporate management team and individual directors
- Head of Internal Audit
- Head of Democratic Services

Key processes:

- management of risk
- financial management
- internal controls
- information management
- performance management
- production of key strategies and plans

The Statutory Roles of the Golden Triangle

Each member of the golden triangle has statutory responsibilities relating to ensuring the council acts lawfully. What does this mean for the relationship between members and those officers?

Local Code of Corporate Governance

- Good practice to have a Local Code
 - Sets out the council's governance arrangements – all the constituent parts, the players, the policies and the practice
 - Publicly available – should be easy to understand and aids transparency
 - Provides clarity of governance structures and roles of members
 - Basis for assurance, internal audit work, and the annual governance statement
 - *Do you know if your council has one or where you can access it?*
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Annual governance statements

- ✓ A public document to assess the effectiveness of the governance framework, risk management and controls
 - ✓ Highlight weaknesses and issues
 - ✓ Include areas for improvement and a forward look
 - ✓ Reviewed by the Audit Committee, approved by Full Council
 - ✓ Signed off by Leader and Chief Executive
 - ✓ A focus on the '*so what*' not just the '*what*' – the '*what*' should be in the Local Code!
 - ✓ Improvement actions monitored throughout the year – the '*now what*'
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Poll 3

How aware are you of the Annual Governance Statement?

Choose one:

- I was not aware of the Annual Governance Statement
 - I am aware the Council has to produce a statement but I know little about it
 - I am aware of the Statement and understand broadly the processes involved and purpose of it
 - I am aware of the Statement and have been actively involved
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A good AGS

- Truly reflects the position of the council
 - Is open, honest, transparent and written with the public in mind
 - Improvement focussed with accountable actions
 - Has member input – audit committee challenge and assurance and full council ownership
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Contents of the AGS

- An executive summary – key conclusions, an overall ‘opinion’, governance outlook, any areas of weakness, signatures (Leader and Chief Executive)
 - Assurance statements from the statutory officers
 - The assessment of effectiveness – following a review process and using various sources of internal and external assurance
 - Areas for improvement – gaps or areas where compliance needs to improve
 - How governance has improved – an updated action plan
 - A forward look – are there any governance challenges ahead / is our governance fit for the future?
-

Contents of the AGS

- The AGS should include and align with the Head of Internal Audits opinion
- Include assurances from the statutory officers
- Consider how the key risks have changed and been managed
- Include external assurances
- Have an action plan
- Be a regular item for the Audit Committee all year

Does yours?

Haringey Council uses its Annual Governance Statement as a tool for improvement...

It is used to provide an honest and open account of assurance, identifying areas for improvement and actions needed.

The Audit Committee requires updates on the action plan from the Statement throughout the year.

[Case study](#)

WHAT DOES GOOD GOVERNANCE & ASSURANCE LOOK LIKE?

What does 'good' look like? (LGA guidance 2024)

1. Visible, collective ownership and leadership of good governance by both political and managerial leaders
2. Being a learning organisation: self-awareness, open to internal and external challenge
3. Assurance as a constant management process, not a one-off event
4. Assurance supports the achievement of priority outcomes
5. Making it easy for the public to hold the council to account

And a culture, led and demonstrated from the top to ensure these things and a fully engaged and empowered workforce.

LGA principles of assurance and accountability

1. Clarity – who is accountable for what?
2. Proportionality
3. A whole-council approach
4. A culture of assurance and accountability
5. Monitoring against standards / benchmarks / local targets
6. Credible, quality data and information
7. Transparency, accessibility and intelligibility of information

How do the governance and assurance systems in your council measure up against these principles?

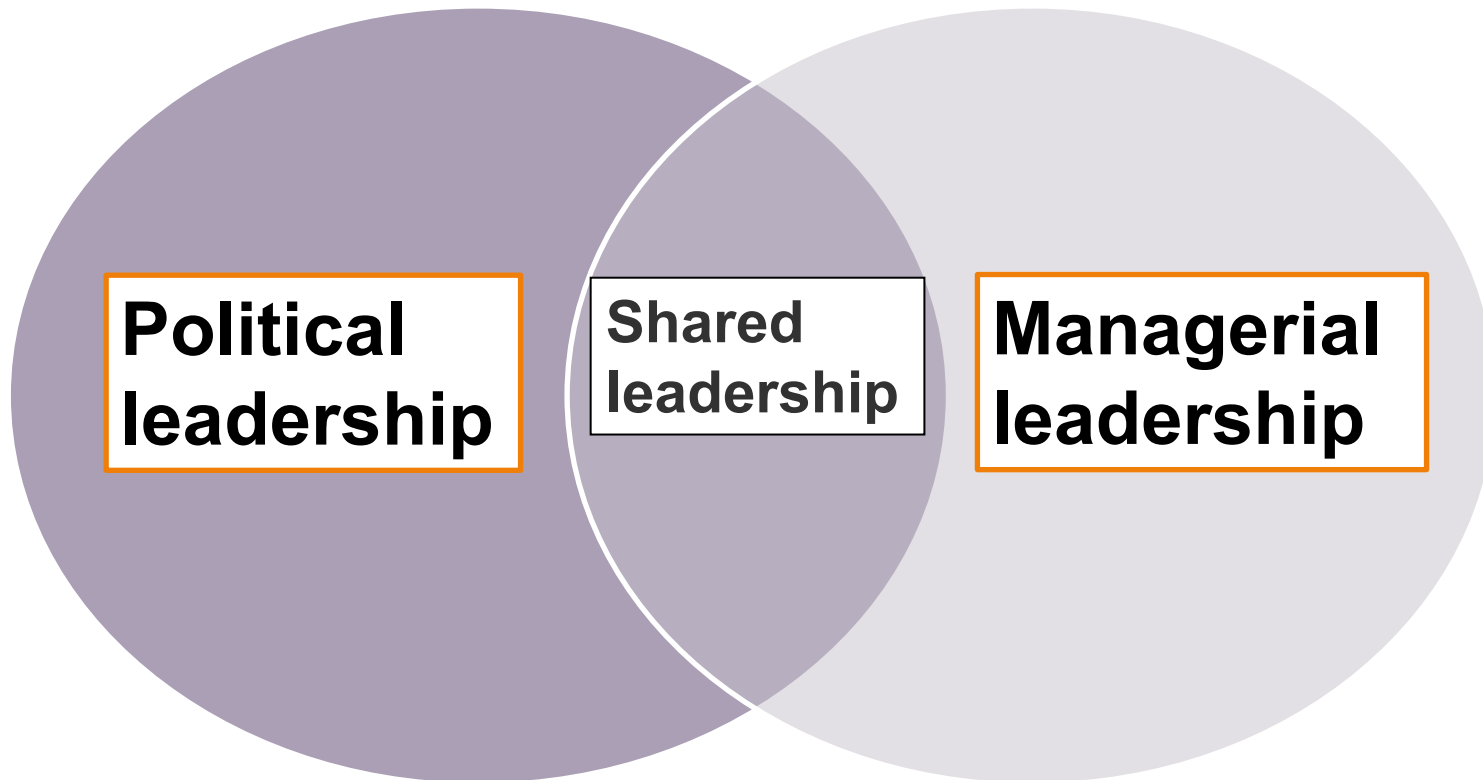
(Potential) indicators of poor governance

- Ineffective overview and scrutiny function
- Ineffective audit committee
- Ineffective chairs for the above committees
- Churn in senior officer posts e.g. s.151, monitoring officer, succession of 'interim' directors
- 'Unexpected' poor inspection / audit results
- Poor or no member training during and/or after induction
- Lack of understanding and knowledge amongst members of governance and assurance
- An absence of a clear, robust performance management framework and processes
- Absence of clear and appropriate governance and assurance systems for partnerships / council owned companies
- A culture where challenge and questioning is discouraged
- A culture where governance and assurance is viewed largely as an officer task
- A culture where non-compliance is accepted
- Inward-focused, with a lack of self-awareness/ external challenge

Source: Dr Stephanie Snape, 2024

COUNCILLOR LEADERSHIP OF GOVERNANCE & ASSURANCE

Political and managerial leadership of governance and assurance



What does leadership by councillors in governance and assurance involve?

**Who 'owns' member leadership of
governance and assurance?
Who is responsible?**

**Good governance is everybody's
business**

Political leadership of governance and assurance

- Role modelling, 'signalling' the importance of good governance and assurance in everyday actions, behaviour and relationships
 - Ensuring good level of general knowledge across members of their roles in governance and assurance and its importance (ensuring take-up of member induction and training)
 - Encouraging and actively supporting a culture where constructive challenge is welcomed
 - Key bodies well supported and working effectively e.g. Overview and Scrutiny, Audit committee, governance committee, with strong and effective chairs
 - Key processes have good level of member oversight e.g. annual review of effectiveness of governance
 - Appropriately seeking assurance that the officer side is robust and working well
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Political leadership roles relating to governance & assurance



What do you view as the role of political leaders in governance and assurance?

Please use the chat to share your views.

Leadership Roles 1: Council Leader / Elected Mayor

1. Lead by example	How do you foster a climate which encourages accountability and promotes high standards of member and officer behaviour?
2. Be publicly accountable	Are there opportunities for members of the public to ask questions at council meetings?
3. Be self-aware	Do you use the council's annual governance statement as an opportunity for honest reflection?
4. Leading a learning organisation	Are the council's whistleblowing channels effective?
5. Know & manage your Risks	Do you know what are the biggest risks your communities face? And the biggest risks to the council?

Leadership Roles 2

Overview & Scrutiny

- Holds the executive / committee chairs to account
- Contributes to policy development
- Reviews policy implementation
- Scrutinises the work of external partners, arms length bodies
- Reviews performance data
- Undertakes budget scrutiny

Audit

- Monitors the effectiveness of the authority's internal controls, risk management and financial reporting
 - Holds internal & external audit to account
 - Approves the internal audit plan and oversees its implementation
 - Reviews internal and external audit reports and opinions
 - Holds management to account in relation to the opinions of internal and external audit
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Leadership Roles 3

Opposition

- Uphold high standards of member behaviour
- Holding ruling group/s to account
- Develop alternative policies & options
- Ensure the needs of the areas they represent are reflected in council policies & services
- Pursue assurance on sound finances, good performance management & robust risk management
- Supporting good governance & assurance

Councillor Concerns

Speak to the monitoring officer if you have governance or assurance concerns

North West Leicestershire District Council

- Cross-party working group leads annual review of the constitution
- Scrutiny has an important role in performance management – encouragement of early involvement of scrutiny
- Audit and Governance Committee undertakes ‘bitesize’ training in advance of each meeting

[Case study](#)

Wiltshire Council

- Council lays emphasis on ensuring good governance and assurance of council owned companies

[Case study](#)

YOUR Good Practice Examples...

Please tell us about examples of good practice from your council – use the chat.

ASSURANCE

Assurance: Where you should be getting it!

- It should be all around you!
 - The formal arrangements through the audit committee, internal and external audit
 - Also, it's just '*how we do things*' – good data and information to support decision-making, performance data / KPIs, stakeholder feedback, risk management
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Challenging questions for assurance

- Do our controls, checks and balances give us sufficient assurance, taking into account our risks?
- Is the 'assurance mix' right? Is there too much reliance on 'management' assurance with little independent assurance from internal audit?
- Are the authority's accountability arrangements, including the annual governance statement, backed up by evidence?
- Do leading councillors, the audit committee, senior officers understand their role and responsibilities regarding assurance?

Developing an Effective Assurance Framework in a Local Authority, CIPFA, 2023

POWERFUL QUESTIONS & OTHER PRACTICAL TOOLS & TIPS

Governance & Assurance: Powerful Questions for Councillors

What are we trying to achieve?	What would success look like?	Who is accountable for what?	What are we doing to manage the risk?
Are the underlying assumptions sound?	Have we learnt from past success and failure?	How are we involving the public & other stakeholders?	Do we have sufficient evidence of assurance?
Are our decision-making processes open and transparent?	How do we compare to other councils?	How important/serious are the issues?	Is there challenge in the system?
Do we have enough information to make a decision?	What might some of the alternatives be?	Has it been implemented to plan?	Are the milestones being achieved?

Source: Dr Stephanie Snape, 2024

Changing culture

Whose role is it to
challenge
inappropriate
behaviour?

- ‘Signalling’ and role modelling are key – leading by example (‘the shadow we cast’)
 - Challenging inappropriate behaviour and practices
 - Training, mentoring, coaching, induction
 - Codes of practice as ‘living’ documents
 - Actions informed by clear, shared values
 - Clear and consistent accountability
 - A learning organisation
 - Organisational development approaches
-

Robust decisions

'making choices among alternative courses of action – which may also include inaction'

- ✓ Evidence based
- ✓ Clear aims, outcomes
- ✓ Informed by written, professional advice (legal, financial...)
- ✓ Informed by consultation / engagement
- ✓ Consideration of meaningful options, risk and governance
- ✓ Disregarding irrelevancies
- ✓ Proportionate, reasonable
- ✓ A presumption in favour of openness
- ✓ Highest standards of ethical conduct

Does your constitution
include decision
making principles?

How robust is your decision-making?

Robust data is key...

How many of these
do you see?

Performance data:

- Budget and budget monitoring information
- Council performance information, RAG ratings
- Compare across years
- Monitor data within year

How do we compare with others?

- [LG Inform](#) – a free value for money benchmarking tool from the LGA
- CIPFA benchmarking

Are your sources of data & evidence providing the information you need to make good decisions and to gain assurance?

USEFUL RESOURCES & SUPPORT FROM THE LGA

LGA Support 1

- Leadership development programmes –
 - [Leadership Academy](#)
 - [Leadership Essentials](#)
 - Financial Governance
 - Finance
 - Audit Committees
 - Risk Leadership for Councillors
 - Finance for Non-Finance Cabinet Members
 - Being an Effective Cabinet Member
 - Leadership for Scrutiny
 - [Workbooks](#) and [e-learning](#)
 - [Chairing skills](#)
 - [Effective councillor-officer relations](#)
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LGA Support 2

- Support through [political group offices](#) and [regional teams](#) (member peers and officers) – including mentoring for Leaders/ Chairs/ Portfolio Holders
 - [Councillor hub](#) provides resources, training, and support to help you navigate your responsibilities
 - [Peer reviews](#) and follow-up support
 - Training and guidance by the [Centre for Governance and Scrutiny](#)
-

LGA and other Resources

LGA – Must Know Guides:

- **Working with Auditors** - [Must Know Guide - Working with auditors](#)
- **The annual budget process** - [Must Know Guide - The annual budget process](#)
- **The statement of accounts** - [Must Know Guide - The statement of accounts](#)
- **Risk management** – [Must Know Guide - Risk Management](#)

LGA – Councillor’s guide: Improvement and assurance framework for local government
- [Councillors guide: Improvement and assurance framework for local government](#)

LGA – Ten questions for Audit Committees - [Ten questions for audit committees](#)

LGA - [Leader’s guide: Leading good governance and assurance](#)

Upcoming – CIPFA – Developing Effective Assurance Frameworks (to be published)

CIPFA/SOLACE - [Delivering good governance in local government: framework](#) (2016)

CIPFA/SOLACE/LLG - [The Golden Triangle Governance Roles and Responsibilities](#)

Local Partnerships - [Local Authority Company Review Guidance](#) (2023)

National Audit Office - [Local Authority Governance](#) (2019)

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

FINAL THOUGHTS & REFLECTION

Final thoughts

- Good governance is everyone's business
 - Governance and assurance require compliance with processes and the right behaviours
 - Culture and behaviours are led from the top (political and managerial leadership)
 - Investment in robust governance and assurance structures and processes will mitigate the risk of operating in challenging times
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Reflection

1. What have been my key learning points from the webinar?
2. What actions will I take on the basis of the webinar?

Please then complete the survey - the link is in the chat. Thank you.

Contact details

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