# North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority Annual Governance Statement 2019-20



### **Delivering Good Governance Framework**

The CIPFA/Solace Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework (2016) (the Framework) requires the Fire and Rescue Authority to publish an Annual Governance Statement, and to be responsible for ensuring that:

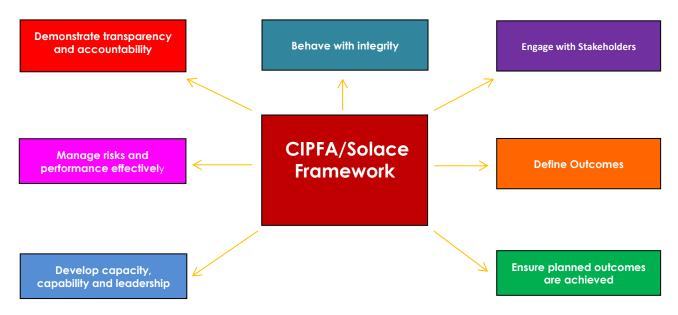
- business is conducted in accordance with all relevant laws and regulations;
- public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for ; and
- resources are used economically, efficiently and effectively to achieve agreed priorities which benefit local people.

To fulfil its wide range of functions, the Authority must satisfy a range of political, economic, social and environmental objectives over the short, medium and longer term. This subjects it to a different set of external and internal constraints and incentives from those found in the private sector, all of which affect its governance arrangements. A key piece of legislation in Wales is the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which requires the Authority to consider the longer term in making its decisions and to work collaboratively with other public bodies to improve well-being in Wales.

Stakeholders are, therefore, interested in issues such as:

- whether the Authority's planned outputs have been delivered and outcomes achieved; and
- whether this has been done in an efficient, economic, effective and equitable manner.

The core principles underpinning the CIPFA/Solace Framework are set out below. The following pages detail how the Authority is meeting these principles.



### **Summary: Governance Arrangements**

The Authority is required to review the effectiveness of its arrangements each year to ensure that there is a sound system of governance. The key contributors to this process are summarised on page 10 and include:

- Regularly reviewing the effectiveness of the Authority's Constitution.
- Having an Authority and committee structure that:
  - monitors the effectiveness of risk management arrangements;
  - regularly reviews the governance arrangements;
  - considers and reviews internal and external audit strategies, plans and reports; and
  - reviews, scrutinises and approves the annual statement of accounts.
- Having an Executive Group that:
  - provides leadership on governance;
  - contributes to the completion and review of the Annual Governance Statement; and
  - provides clear direction to the Service and senior managers.
- The use of information from various sources to inform the governance arrangements, for example:
  - performance reports;
  - risk management arrangements;
  - external regulator reports; and
  - the Internal Audit Annual Report.

Achievements against the core principles are set out within pages 5 – 11. The Authority's agreed improvement actions for 2019/20 are contained on page 13, which confirms the progress made.

#### **Covid-19 Governance Impact**

During March 2020, the Coronavirus pandemic resulted in a nationwide lockdown as attempts were made to lessen the impact of the evolving crisis. The Authority responded to maintain an emergency response across North Wales, whilst putting the necessary control measures in place to reduce the risks associated with Covid-19 and to maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff and the communities that we serve.

Whilst we were still able to deliver our emergency response, this has impacted on our 'business as usual' for non-emergency service delivery with, where possible, alternative models being used to continue the delivery of our services. This has and will continue to have an impact on the Authority's governance arrangements. The impacts on governance will fall into the following broad categories:

• Impact on business as usual delivery of services;

- New areas of activity as part of the national response to coronavirus and any governance issues arising;
- The funding of the financial implications and logistical consequences of delivering the local government response;

• Assessment of the long-term disruption and consequences arising from the coronavirus.

This continues to be closely monitored and we will conduct a review of the lessons to be learned from our response and identify any improvement actions.

A number of meetings were cancelled during the lockdown period and arrangements were revised in accordance with the amended regulations issued by the Welsh Government.

The Welsh Government has issued the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020. These regulations make temporary provision until 1 May 2021, in relation to fire and rescue authority meetings, and for public and press access to these meetings during the COVID-19 emergency. Moving forward remote meetings will be held during the period that social distancing arrangements are in place.

During the lockdown period following consultation with the Chief Fire Officer, and with the approval of the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority, the Monitoring Officer implemented temporary governance arrangements to enable essential decision making to continue, including:

- 1 The scheduled annual, business and committee meetings of NWFRA up to December 2020 will be replaced by a single meeting of the full Authority conducted via videoconferencing on 9 November 2020, 9.30am-1pm;
- 2 Part of the agenda at the November meeting will be dedicated to matters that would normally be dealt with at the Authority's annual meeting, including the election of Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the Authority and the Audit Committee for the period up to the next annual meeting in June 2021;
- 3 Between March and September 2020 meetings have been held between the Chief Fire Officer and the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority;
- 4 From September 2020 onwards, informal, closed sessions will be held for all Members to receive information from officers and to discuss key issues ahead of the November 2020 meeting. These sessions will focus primarily on shaping the Authority's improvement priorities and budget-setting for 2021/22; and
- 5 In addition to the regular contact that already exists between the Chair and the Chief Fire Officer, a new "Temporary Consultative Committee"

will be meeting on an ad hoc basis to act as a sounding board if and when any significant issues arise during this time. This Temporary Consultative Committee will comprise the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Authority, the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Audit Committee, the Treasurer, the Chief Fire Officer and the Clerk.

#### Actions for 2020/21 and monitoring arrangements

The action plan for 2020/21 is set out in Appendix A, which will be monitored, quarterly by the Executive Group.

Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

- The Constitution sets out the responsibilities of the Fire and Rescue Authority and its committees and includes the Scheme of Delegation to Officers.
- The Monitoring Officer ensures that decisions taken are within the law and comply with the provisions of the Constitution.
- The Constitution includes the Code of Conduct for Members and this is monitored by the Standards Committee.
- Where necessary legal advice is sought to inform decision making.
- Codes of Conduct for Members and Officers are in place, which requires the declaration of business interests and recording of the receipt of gifts and/or hospitality.
- The Authority has a procedure to receive and respond to any complaints received. A summary report of complaints and appreciations is provided to the Fire and Rescue Authority annually.
- Key policies are in place to prevent and minimise the risk of fraud. Policies include: Whistleblowing Policy, Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy and Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules. Where irregularity is suspected arrangements are in place to ensure that it is thoroughly investigated.
- The recruitment policy, induction and training processes incorporate personal behaviours with ethical values. The core values of the Service are fully embedded and include; service to the community, people, diversity and improvement.
- Attainment of the Public Health Wales Corporate Health Bronze and Platinum awards.
- The Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG) considers matters relating to equality, diversity and cultural issues. The Group reviewed and updated the core values in 2019/20 to reflect our modern and professional ways of working.
- Disciplinary cases and any allegations of wrongdoing are investigated in accordance with the Service's Discipline Handbook.
- A Strategic Equality Plan is published in compliance with the Equality Act 2010. Equality objectives are reviewed annually and monitored throughout the year.
- As part of our commitment to the Welsh language, all new members of staff are required to achieve a minimum of Level 2 Welsh language skills.
- The Improvement and Well-being Plan is published on the Authority's website. This details the improvement objectives as required by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, and well-being objectives in accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- Safeguarding procedures are in place to refer vulnerable people the Service come into contact with, to other agencies.

#### Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

- All meetings are advertised and open to the public and full Authority meetings are webcast. Agendas and papers are available on the Authority's website.
- Information is published on the Authority's website as part of the publication scheme. Easy read/read speak/Welsh versions of documents are provided.
- Public consultation arrangements are in place to invite the views of stakeholders prior to developing and implementing key changes. This includes consultation on the Improvement and Well-being Plan
- The commitment to openness is also shown through:
  - completion of impact assessments for all key decisions;
  - the Complaints and Compliments Procedure which includes Authority reporting arrangements;
  - the Public Engagement and Consultation Strategy (presented to the July 2018 meeting of the Executive Panel);
  - engagement with Employee Representative Bodies;
  - membership of the North Wales Equality Group.
- A variety of engagement methods are used including:
  - directed communication using social media, with accounts on Facebook and Twitter. Ability to sign up for email updates on specific issues via the website;
  - engagement with young people via the Phoenix programme and school visits;
  - community safety engagement with householders and businesses;
  - Positive Action events and attendance at park runs for firefighter recruitment;
  - attendance at open days/events for example the Eisteddfod;
  - quarterly bulletin on the website;
  - internal communications include the Weekly Brief and Y Fflam newsletter;
  - participation in the Local Resilience Forum's Warning and Informing Group including an agreement to retweet messages to reach a wider audience;
  - public media campaigns, led by the Community Safety Managers.
- Partnership arrangements are in place to deliver certain outcomes. For example, Principal Officers attend the four local Public Services Boards and the Regional Partnership Board. They also participate in the Emergency Services Collaboration Board and undertake joint training and exercises.
- The Service is a key member of Let's Get Moving North Wales whose collaborative aims are to support everyone in North Wales to move more, and by doing so support their physical and mental wellbeing.

Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

- The Improvement and Well-being Plan sets the strategic direction for the Authority and details the improvement objectives in accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, and well-being objectives in accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- The Service has amended its four core values People, Diversity and Inclusivity, Striving For Excellence and Service to the Community. These summarise the principles and personal values that staff are encouraged to adopt and demonstrate.
- The Service has gained White Ribbon accreditation which demonstrates a commitment to stop violence against women.
- The Service has a statutory duty to put in place business continuity arrangements. Plans across the Service have been updated. There is ongoing collaboration with the other fire and rescue services in Wales to improve planning and consider current risks. The National Issues Committee includes a business continuity work stream.
- The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and annual budget process ensures that financial resources are directed to the Authority's priorities.
- Partnership working is undertaken where there are shared objectives and advantages from working together for example, the Strategic Arson Reduction Board and Public Services Boards.
- The Strategic Risk Management Policy sets out the process used to identify and control exposure to uncertainty, which may impact on the achievement of the objectives or activities. This is reviewed throughout the year to ensure that risks are identified and appropriately assessed. The Corporate Risk Register records these risks, and they are regularly monitored, by the Corporate Planning Department and reported to the Executive Panel.
- The Wales Fire and Rescue Procurement Strategy 2016/2021 sets out the procurement strategic objectives and documents the areas for development to ensure the Welsh Procurement Policy Statement Principles are met.
- Key decisions are subject to an integrated impact assessment, which takes account of equality, protection, health, safety and wellbeing, Welsh language, finance, sustainability and staffing, Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- Safeguarding procedures are in place to refer vulnerable people the Service come into contact with, to other agencies.

Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

- Public consultation is carried out as part of setting the Authority's annual objectives which are set out in the Improvement and Well-being Plan. This outlines how the Authority intends to work together with other public bodies to tackle the complex issues that affect people's lives. An assessment of the Authority's performance is produced in October each year and published.
- The Authority's Strategic Risk Management Policy sets out the process used to identify and control exposure to uncertainty, which may impact on the achievement of the objectives or activities. This is reviewed throughout the year to ensure that risks are appropriately managed.
- Following scrutiny from senior managers, performance and financial reports are presented to the Authority and its committees. Accountability meetings are held regularly with all senior managers to review objectives and budget management.
- Monitoring of availability, the workforce and budgets ensure interventions occur when required. Issues are discussed at Chief Officers Advisory Team and Senior Manager meetings.
- National Operational Guidance available and an operational learning forum manages and implements any changes
- There is a significant amount of partnership working across Wales to respond to issues facing the fire sector and other more general public sector issues. Collaboration with multiple agencies is an important aspect of the Authority's work including prevention and protection, responding to incidents and use of resources.
- The budget planning processes ensure budgets are prepared in accordance with objectives, strategies and the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). This involves input from both Service leads and Authority Members. It shows how the resources will be deployed over the next few years to deliver agreed outcomes and agreed priorities.
- The Wales Fire and Rescue Procurement Strategy 2016/2021 sets out the procurement strategic objectives. Specialist procurement advice is sought and contracts are awarded in line with recognised frameworks, ensuring both value for money and that ethical principles have been followed.

Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

- The Authority's Constitution outlines the roles of elected members and designated officers to enable shared understanding of roles and objectives. The designated posts include the Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer and Monitoring Officer.
- The Principal Officers hold regular reviews of service delivery, performance and risk through accountability meetings.
- Collaborative and partnership working is in place regionally and nationally. For example, the three fire and rescue services in Wales are part of the all Wales Fire Investigation Training Forum. This supports shared learning and promotes a consistent approach across Wales.
- The All Wales People and Organisational Development Strategy 2018-2021 underpins the commitment to lifelong learning and workplace competence.
- Induction processes are in place for Members and employees. These include an introduction to the organisation's core values, the standards of conduct and the role requirements.
- The development needs of employees are identified through one to one, supervision and appraisal meetings. This year a future leaders programme has been developed for staff already employed and future leader apprenticeships have also been advertised.
- The health and wellbeing of the workforce is key to the organisation and support is provided to maintain physical and mental wellbeing. This is achieved through a range of measures including HR policies and guidance documents, flexible working approach, the occupational health service and the employee assistance programme.
- The Service has a dedicated training department, with competency frameworks for operational staff. Training is delivered using a variety of methods including e-learning modules which are mandatory for certain subjects e.g. Data Protection.
- Arrangements are in place for internal reviews of compliance with Service standards and health and safety requirements.
- Staff are members of relevant professional bodies and undertake the required continual professional development.

Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

- The Treasurer is responsible for the proper administration of the Authority's financial affairs as required by \$151 Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- The Monitoring Officer ensures compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations.
- The Strategic Risk Management Policy details the process for the identification and control of risks. A corporate risk register is maintained by the Corporate Planning Department and is monitored throughout the year.
- Reports to the Authority and its committees include an integrated impact assessment to inform and support decisions.
- Business continuity arrangements are in place to ensure that critical services can continue to be delivered at all times.
- Management arrangements ensure that recommendations for improvement made by the Internal Auditor are agreed and monitored.
- Members and senior management are provided with regular reports on Service performance against key performance indicators and milestones.
- The Authority has arrangements to maintain registers of Members' personal and business interests and a register of gifts and hospitality.
- Policies for Anti-Fraud and Corruption and Whistle-blowing are in place which confirms the Authority's commitment to operating in a fair and transparent manner.
- Policies and arrangements are in place to manage the handling of data. These are the Data Protection Policy, Freedom of Information Policy, Data Retention Policy and Communications and Information Security Policy. These policies are supplemented with training and the e-learning module on data protection is mandatory for all staff.
- Information sharing protocols have been developed and agreed with partners.
- Financial management supports the delivery of services and transformational change as well as securing good stewardship. A financial update is presented to each Authority meeting, with reports available to the public on the website.
- The Treasury Management arrangements follow professional practices and are reviewed annually by members.
- The Authority's Statements of Accounts are subject to scrutiny by external audit.

#### Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability

- The Fire and Rescue Authority, with assistance from the Monitoring Officer, oversees and reviews the adequacy and effectiveness of the governance arrangements and internal control environment.
- Agendas and minutes of meetings are publicly available on the internet along with webcasts of the Authority meetings (when available).
- Authority reports follow a structured format which ensures that key information is presented in a clear and consistent manner to aid decision making.
- The Authority has a publication scheme and complies with the requirements of the Information Commissioner in relation to Freedom of Information requests which ensures the public have access to information held.
- The Improvement and Well-being Plan documents the objectives of the Authority.
- The Annual Statement of Accounts was reviewed to ensure a more user friendly format. This provides clear information on income and expenditure and demonstrates the stewardship of public money for the year. The accounts are submitted for audit by the statutory deadline of 31 May.
- The Annual Pay Policy Statement is approved and published in accordance with the Localism Act 2011. Members' salaries are paid in accordance with the Independent Remuneration Panel decisions and reported on the internet.
- Members and senior officers declare relevant interests in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK. These declarations enable the Authority to identify and report any related party transactions.
- The Annual Governance Statement provides transparency on the governance arrangements and the planned improvements for the coming year.
- The Annual Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement are subject to scrutiny and approval in accordance with the Authority's Constitution.
- The Wales Audit Office is the appointed external auditor and provides an opinion on the Statement of Accounts, which is published on the Authority's website. The Authority acts on recommendations and, where necessary, takes corrective action.
- The Internal Audit arrangements include a risk based approach, which provides assurance that key risks are being managed. The Authority acts on recommendations and where necessary, takes corrective action.
- Processes are in place to ensure that recommendations from inspection and regulatory bodies are actioned.

## Key Contributors to Developing and Maintaining the Governance Framework

Fire and Rescue Authority	The Authority provides the strategic leadership, political interface and corporate challenge in relation to the provision of fire and rescue services across North Wales, encouraging public participation and conducting its affairs in an open and transparent manner. It agrees the Improvement and Wellbeing Plan, and the revenue and capital budgets.
Executive Panel	Monitors the performance of the Service and makes recommendations to the Authority on its key policies including the Improvement and Wellbeing Plan. The Panel reviews the strategic risk register.
Planning Working Group	Undertakes detailed work associated with the Authority's planning and budget-setting process. It submits its observations to the Executive Panel which in turn makes recommendations for improvement/risk reduction/well-being objectives to the Authority.
Audit Committee	Provides independent review of the governance, risk management and control frameworks and oversees the financial reporting, including the Treasury Management Strategy and annual accounts.
Standards Committee	Promotes and maintains high standards of conduct by Members of the Authority and oversees the whistle-blowing policy for complaints against Members of the Authority. Also, where statute permits, to receive reports and complaints about Members and to conduct or oversee investigations and make recommendations to the Authority.
Executive Group	Sets and leads the implementation of the governance standards across the Service. Receives the annual improvement plan and feeds into the annual self-assessment.
Internal Audit	Provides an annual independent and objective opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control, risk management and governance arrangements. Investigates fraud and irregularity.

### How has the Authority Addressed the Governance Improvement Actions from 2019/20?

The Annual Governance and Improvement Assessment 2019/20 contained the following improvement actions. Here is how they have been addressed:

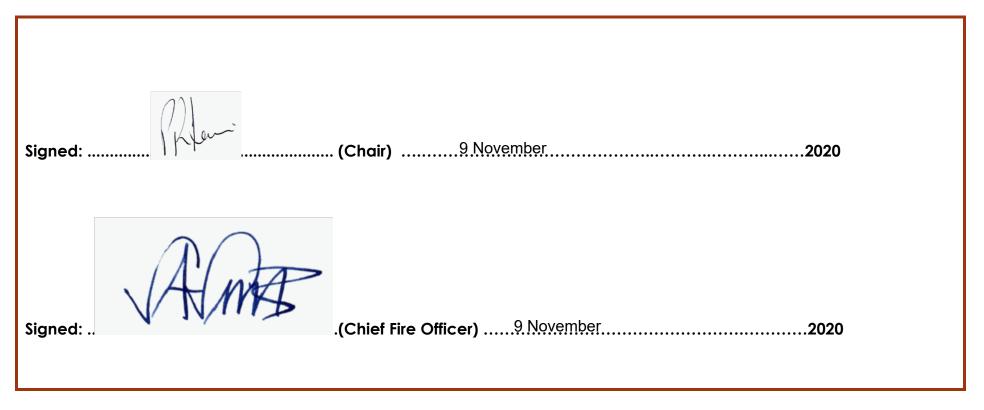
Improvement Action	Responsibility	Progress as at March 2020
Engage and participate with the Minister on the Governance and Funding Arrangements of Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities.	Chief Fire Officer and Chair	Engagement with the Welsh Government has continued and updates to the Fire and Rescue Authority have been provided. The Authority will maintain a watching brief to ensure that any changes are fully action.
White Fleet review Undertake a review and update of policy, procedures and guidance for the management of white fleet vehicles; and Revise the vehicle log system to strengthen the governance regarding vehicle tracking and management.	ACO (Finance and Resources) ACFO (Operations) Head of Finance Fleet Manager	Action has been taken to fully implement HMRC rules and guidelines whilst maintaining operational requirements. Robust monitoring by the Fleet department is carried out to ensure the use of vehicles is maximised for service delivery.
Financial Regulations and Finance Policies to be reviewed in line with the CIPFA model to ensure they reflect the requirements of the Authority.	ACO (Finance and Resources) Head of Finance	A review has been carried out to ensure completeness in line with the CIPFA guidance. Further work to be undertaken to update the regulations to reflect the requirements of the Fire and Rescue Authority.
Undertake procurement of Treasurer Services.	ACO (Finance and Resources)	The contract with current Treasurer extended for 12 months.
Review of structure and pay arrangements to ensure effective strategic management.	Monitoring Officer	The Chief Fire Officer presented to Fire and Rescue Authority members following the December 2019 meeting.

Improvement Action	Responsibility	Progress as at March 2020
Standards of Conduct for staff to be reviewed.	ACFO (Operations) Head of HR	The Standards of Conduct have been updated for approval by the Executive Group. Meetings currently suspended due to COVID-19.
Complete Cyber Essentials Plus to guard against cyber threats.	ACO (Finance and Resources) Head of ICT	A baseline assessment has been undertaken by the ICT Department with action plans in place to address risks and ensure compliance. Regular updates are provided to the Information Strategy Group.

#### Governance Opinion and Conclusion

The Authority recognises that good governance provides the foundation for the delivery of good quality services that meet the needs of stakeholders and ensures that public money is well spent. This review confirms the governance systems and monitoring in place for 2019/20 and the steps taken to ensure that they are working effectively.

The Authority is satisfied that appropriate governance arrangements are in place and remains committed to enhancing these through the implementation of the action plan for 2020/21.



Improvement Action	Action	Responsibility	Timescale
Standing Financial Instructions	The Financial Regulations and Finance Policies will be reviewed to ensure they reflect the requirements of the Fire and Rescue Authority.	ACO (Finance and Resources) Head of Finance	March 2021
Standards of Conduct	The Standards of Conduct for staff will be finalised and approved by the Executive Group.	ACFO (Operations) Head of HR	September 2020
Cyber Security	Continuation of 2019/2020 action by the ICT department, in relation to Cyber Essentials Plus to guard against cyber threats,	ACO (Finance and Resources) Head of ICT	March 2021
Embed a co-ordinated corporate planning and financial planning cycle	In order to assist with the future planning and financing of the service objectives, a co-ordinated corporate planning and financial planning cycle will be introduced to ensure the Fire and Rescue Authority is engaged in forward planning in line with the corporate objectives and Medium Term Financial Plan.	Head of Finance Corporate Planning Manager	March 2021
Environmental Strategy	Following on from the environmental and energy policy statements adopted previously, the Planning Working Group will develop a new environmental strategy.	ACO (Corporate Services) Corporate Planning Manager	March 2021

Improvement Action	Action	Responsibility	Timescale
Fire Safety regulatory environment	Support a regional and national response to the Grenfell incident and implement any procedural changes resulting from the independent review.	ACFO (Fire Safety) Senior Fire Safety Manager	March 2021
Review of Business Continuity Arrangements	Following the implementation of business continuity plans, in March 2020, a review will be completed to ensure lessons learned and where applicable arrangements updated.	Principal Officers	December 2020
Ensure government guidance in relation to transitional pension arrangements is actioned	Complete all actions and requirements arising from the Scheme Advisory Board for Wales.	ACO (Finance & Resources) Pensions Manager	March 2021

#### Appendix B - Summary of the Authority's Governance Framework

#### Principles of Good Governance

Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

Developing the Authority's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and employees Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong financial management

Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability

