

What makes for good governance?

Good practice approaches include:

- Creating and regularly reviewing a vision and direction for your organisation so that everyone understands what they are there to deliver.
- Indicating the level of service to be delivered – you can't be excellent at everything so what will you concentrate on and what can be good enough?
- Board / Member and officer roles are clearly defined, with schemes of delegation and codes of practice/conduct, so that everyone understands what they should and should not be doing.
- Having standing orders, financial regulations and guidance notes so that everyone knows what procedures are to be followed.
- A robust, challenging and supporting audit committee to provide oversight and review.
- Arrangements to ensure that you comply with laws and regulations and identify and act on changes promptly.
- Appropriate and flexible whistle-blowing arrangements.
- Methods to identify and act on officer and member development needs.
- Excellent and open communication with your community.
- Ways to ensure good governance in all your partnerships.
- Promotion of the values of good governance and ethical standards.

How do you draw up a good statement?

- Review and map your assurance framework to make sure that it covers all areas, including the hard to reach ones such as partnerships, and that you do not have any duplication in assurance.
- Obtain wide engagement – not just the head of audit or governance doing everything, but getting mini-governance or assurance statements from directors and heads of service that contribute to the overarching statement and/or setting up a working group to develop the statement.
- Be open and honest – it's about improvement and adding value, not about looking good.
- Be prepared to challenge yourself and look for areas for improvement, perhaps by benchmarking or comparing yourself with other organisations.
- Compare the assurances received to the strategic risk register. Are there any high risk areas that have not been adequately covered?
- Look for any inconsistencies or discrepancies. For example, has assurance been provided that there are no significant problems in an area but you have conflicting evidence from elsewhere (audit, risk, performance, complaints, fraud, etc)?
- Check progress against action plans during the year so problems can be dealt with quickly and governance becomes part of the way we do things round here, not just a once-a-year activity.
- Ensure that the action plan is widely known and understood in the organisation and beyond so that those charged with action are held to account and delivery is more likely.

Key questions to ask:

1. What process has the organisation gone through to gather evidence to support the AGS/SIC/SIFC? Has it involved staff from across the organisation?
2. Have assurance statements already gone through a process of challenge and review prior to presentation to the audit committee? What did this show?
3. Does the action plan flow out of the statement and identify the major issues we need to address as an organisation?
4. Does the action plan include actions outstanding from previous years, prioritised as necessary?
5. How will the action plan be communicated to staff, stakeholders and the public?