STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 16 APRIL 2024

Report Title	Updated Information Governance Framework
Purpose of Report	For Committee to consider the changes to the reviewed and consolidated Information Governance (iGov) Framework (2024-2028).
Decision(s)	**The Committee RESOLVES to:** a) **Approve the revised Information Governance Framework; and** b) **Delegate responsibility to the Data Protection Officer to make minor changes to the Information Governance Framework.**
Consultation and Feedback	Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit – Surveillance policy wording Policy & Governance team – Accessibility and editing
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Options	1. Accept revised and consolidated framework. 2. Revert to individual policies, procedures, and guidance.
Background Papers	None
Appendices	1 - Information Governance Framework 2024 – 2028

Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	Yes	No	No

1. Introduction

1.1 Information Governance (iGov) is agreed upon ways in which the Council manages data and information. The three principal areas of interest at Stroud District Council are:

- **Data Protection** – The control of personal data. (GDPR etc.)
- **Government Transparency** – The proactive publication of information (Spending etc.)
- **Access to Information** - The reactive publication of information (FOI etc.)

1.2 In 2019 a suite of iGov policies and procedures was created to provide guidance for the key areas of this field. Since this time, and the last review in 2022, there have been best practice, technology, and risk changes which require that the existing documentation be reviewed again.

2. Overview of iGov work since 2022

- Creation of intranet support pages and guidance documentation covering all aspects of iGov.
- Improved data resilience and iGov knowledge across officers with training of ~50 champions and increased engagement across services to support individual needs.
- Developed accountability standards through improved reporting of iGov issues.
- In partnership with ICT improved the security of Council data using existing technology.
- Improved support for Subject Access and Freedom of Information request management.
  - We receive ~600 requests for information annually.
  - Yet we only receive an average of 6 information related complaints a year.
- Guided the introduction of responsible AI usage.
- Improved awareness of data related compliance across the Council.
- In partnership with the multiple services, developing new technology for improved complaints and information request management and reporting.
- Driven improvements to learning from data breaches by introducing the procedures in the Framework.

- o Thanks to the work of our ICT team in securing and maintaining our infrastructure, we have very low occurrence of configuration and cyber related data breaches.
- o Our key risk for data breaches, which is shared by most organisations, remains low risk 'human error' breaches, such as sending things to a wrong recipient or failing to redact information.
- o As part of the breach procedure managers are providing learning actions to mitigate reoccurrence and officers are encouraged to take the time they need to get things right first time when managing sensitive and personal information.
- o We have also developed clearer retention guidance and reiterated adherence to the data protection principles to reduce ongoing risks.

3. Review of the iGov Framework

3.1 To align with the Council values and improve accessibility for members and officers, the framework has been revised and consolidated in line with best practice from ~10 documents into a single, *One Council* reference and guidance document.

3.2 While iGov is informed by several pieces of legislation, individual decisions frequently rely on critical analysis of our framework by officers to reach the most suitable conclusion. This updated framework of one easy-to-use document will make the decision-making process easier and clearer when compared to using and cross-referencing multiple documents included in the previous framework.

3.3 If our iGov procedures fail for any reason this may cause negative consequences for our customers, potential monetary fines for the Council of up to £17.5 million per incident, possible claims for compensation and significant reputational damage. It is of note that in June 2022 the Information Commissioner scaled back the use of fines in the public sector noting: "In practice this will mean an increase in public reprimands and the use of my wider powers, including enforcement notices, with fines only issued in the most egregious cases."

3.4 The importance of having effective iGov policies and procedures is recognised and to reflect this there is a risk included in the Council's Strategic Risk Register on Ideagen which this committee reviews at each meeting. This risk (SR2) has appropriate levels of controls identified and the risk is regularly monitoring and reviewed.

3.5 We will continue to improve the accessibility and understanding of this often-complex area, with this revised framework being a key piece of the solution and mitigation if issues arise. We will ensure that the framework is continually updated with changes to legislation and best practice, and that any significant amendments will be brought back before this Committee.

4. Key Changes

4.1 Changed the following policy documents to procedures to reflect current best practice:
- Data Breach Policy
- Information Complaints Policy
- Anonymisation & Pseudonymisation Policy
- Records Management Policy

4.2. Reviews of the following policies:
- Surveillance Policy – Reduced size to focus on 'need to know' information
- Data Protection Policy – Amended to reflect current Council environment and best practice

4.3 Added the following sections:
- iGov long term strategy – Aligned with the four Council values.
- Guidance on the use of artificial intelligence – To address member, officer, and public interest.
- Procurement guidance – To signpost importance of data protection in procurement.
- Information request procedure – To provide corporate approach to information requests.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Like many corporate functions of an organisation, you will seldom hear about iGov when it is working well. However, officers work hard every day to ensure we comply with relevant legislation, protect our customers data, deliver on our transparency requirements, and respond to the hundreds of information requests we receive every year.

5.2 The Framework confirms the Council's commitment to support the rights of individuals to request information and exercise other rights over their data. The Policy & Governance team will continue to support this work by making policy and process improvements to ensure that individuals can exercise those rights as easily as possible.

5.3 We also bring the Committees attention to the likelihood that major new data protection legislation is likely come into force within the next 2 years, the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill. When this legislation is enacted into law, the framework will be updated, and training provided to Officers and Members.

6.   Implications

6.1 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The cost of non compliance is significant and so it is important to have a framework in place.

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6.2 Legal Implications

This report and iGov framework references the Council's statutory duties and obligations under the UK GDPR, Data protection Act 2018, FOIA and associated legislation and guidance. The Council has duties under this legislation in terms of accountability and compliance and must ensure it has appropriate policies and technical/organisational measures in place. The Council must also be able to show that it has adhered to the framework and associated policies, which may include awareness training, training, monitoring and audits.
A failure to ensure compliance could result in enforcement action by the ICO, damage to reputation and claims for compensation by aggrieved parties, amongst other things.

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6.3 Equality Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed but as there are no specific changes to service delivery proposed within this decision, no positive or negative impacts on any protected characteristics were identified.

The work undertaken to consolidate the Information Governance policies into one framework should improve accessibility as well as the quality and time of responses.

6.4 Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.