

Staff Report

Presented By: Kara Van Myall, Chief Administrative Officer

Meeting Date: February 10, 2025

Subject: Council Governance Framework

Attachment(s): None

Recommendation

That Council receive the Council Governance Framework report for information.

Report Summary

Effective governance is a cornerstone of organizational success, ensuring that decisions are made transparently, ethically, and in alignment with strategic goals. This report aims to provide an outline of key governance areas that are often explored when building an effective framework and outlines next steps to advance this work.

Background/Analysis

The **Town's Strategic Plan** outlines **Pillar 2: Building the Best Municipal Team** and notes the **Objective: Deliver service excellence through long-term planning and an inclusive team environment**. Effective governance is pivotal to an organization's success, ensuring transparency, ethics, and in alignment with strategic goals in decision making. The scope of a governance framework focuses on the overall structure, processes and systems used to direct and manage an organization.

This overview aims to provide an outline of key governance areas that are often explored when building an effective framework and outlines the next steps to developing a roadmap for Council consideration. This roadmap will provide direction for Business Planning in future years to build a robust framework.

As the 2025 Business Plan outlined, staff will be supporting Council in identifying what is working well and potential areas of focus that Council may wish to develop structure around. The key areas of focus are outlined below:

Key Governance Areas

1. Council Relationships and Communications

Effective communication among elected officials is essential for successful governance. The following points outline key considerations for maintaining and improving communication within the Council:

- How do elected officials follow a process to address disagreement and restore communications?
- How do elected officials conduct themselves appropriately on social media?
- Are there effective communication processes between the Mayor and Chief Administrative Officer?
- How does Council respond to public requests in a consistent manner and approach?
- How do elected officials conduct themselves respectfully and professionally with one another in public and closed forums?

2. Role Clarity and Evaluation

Clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of Council, its committees, and management is crucial. Regular evaluation and accountability mechanisms help ensure continuous improvement in governance practices. Governance questions in this area may include:

- What are the specific roles of the Mayor, Council, and municipal management?
- How can effective communication and conduct be ensured among Council members in public and closed forums?
- How is the performance and effectiveness of the Council and its committees regularly evaluated?
- What accountability mechanisms are in place for Council members and management actions?
- How do Ad Hoc and Working Committees provide expert advice and support decision-making?

3. Strategic Alignment and Decision Making

Effective governance requires robust mechanisms for facilitating Council decision making and focus on the strategic priorities of the municipality. The Clerks Division completed a comprehensive **update to the Town's Procedural By-law in 2024**. Further, the Province is introducing improvements to the **Provincial system to Integrity Commissioners** that will have implications for the Town's processes. Outside of those updates key questions include:

- How are Council meetings conducted, and what are the expectation around Council preparedness and participation?
- Elected officials effectively discuss strategic topics, and the meetings are focused on strategic priorities?
- How does the organization engage with its Council members and address their concerns?
- What measures are taken to prevent and manage conflicts of interest?

Note that 2025 will see the advancement of the **Delegation of Powers Policy** for Council consideration to streamline decision making where Council deems appropriate.

4. Ethics, Responsibility and Transparency

Ensuring ethical conduct and compliance with laws and regulations is essential for good governance. Transparency and disclosure build trust with the public and community partners. In 2025, a **Province-wide update to Council Codes of Conduct** will impact the Town's processes. Governance frameworks set direction, while codes of conduct ensure ethical behavior. Together, they foster a successful organization. Key questions include:

- What codes of conduct and ethics policies are in place for council members, management, and employees?
- How does the municipality monitor and enforce compliance with these policies, and what are the reporting mechanisms for unethical behavior?
- What disciplinary actions are taken for misconduct, and how are investigations handled?
- What standards and frameworks guide the municipality's financial and non-financial disclosures, and how are these communicated to stakeholders?
- How does the public interact with Council and the organization and what are the expectations? **Clerks Future Year Highlight: Public Code of Conduct**

5. Council Structure and Composition

The structure and composition of a municipal council are fundamental to effective governance. Questions often focus on the size of the council, the diversity of skills and backgrounds among council members, and the independence of representatives.

The Clerks Division will be reviewing Council structure and composition through **their 2025 Division Highlight – Ward Boundary and Council Composition Direction** which will consider questions like:

- What is the optimal council size for effective decision-making?
- How diverse is the council in terms of skills, experience, and demographics?
- Does the environment around the Council table allow for diversity of perspectives?
- Are there mechanisms in place to ensure regular council evaluations?

Planned in 2025 is a **Council Leave Policy Review** to comply with statutory requirements.

Conclusion

The Council of the Town of Saugeen Shores is commended for its forward thinking in preparing a robust framework for municipal leadership, supporting the Strategic Plan goal to build the best municipal team. By developing a roadmap to create structures and systems, as well as implementing policies like the Council Leave Policy, Council demonstrates its commitment to effective governance.

As has been outlined, establishing a comprehensive governance framework is crucial for several reasons:

- It ensures that the Council operates efficiently and makes informed decisions;
- It reflects the diversity and needs of the community it serves;
- It creates systems of regular evaluations;
- It ensures adherence to statutory requirements; and
- It enhances transparency and accountability, fostering public trust and engagement.

Next Steps

To advance a comprehensive discussion with Council on these matters, a confidential survey will be sent out to members of Council to provide input on the categories noted above. The Confidential Survey will be administered by Civic Engagement and there is no cost associated. This aggregated data will be used to develop a Roadmap which will be returned to Council for consideration. It is anticipated that the survey will be completed in February with a report back in early Q2.

In summary, the Council's proactive measures in governance not only uphold the principles of good leadership but also pave the way for a more dynamic and responsive municipal government.

Linkages

- Strategic Plan Alignment: Pillar 2: Building the Best Municipal Team
- Business Plan Alignment: CAO Major Initiative

Financial Impacts/Source of Funding

No costs or revenue is associated with this report.

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