



Guildford Borough Council
Annual Governance Statement 2023-24

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Corporate Governance and Standards Committee	Ver 2.0	20 February 2025	As amended

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What is the annual governance statement?

Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 requires that 'a relevant authority must, each financial year conduct a review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control required by regulation 3 and prepare (and approve) an Annual Governance Statement'.

Scope of Responsibility

Guildford Borough Council is responsible for ensuring that it conducts its business in accordance with the law and proper standards and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to plan to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs to facilitate the effective exercise of its functions, including arrangements for the management of risk.

The Council has considered the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government* (2016), including compliance with the CIPFA publication on *The Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government* (2016) in the preparation of this statement together with the recently published (13th March 2024) Independent Governance Review of Guildford Borough Council by Solace in Business Ltd (SOLACE).

In July 2023 a potential fraud was identified within the HRA in relation to the Commercial in Confidence housing maintenance contracts. These contracts had been let in October 2021 and June 2023. The potential fraud related to substandard work, duplicate invoices and work not completed. This is still subject to an ongoing police investigation and therefore we are unable to estimate the final financial effect.

This statement explains how the Council has complied with the code and meets the requirements of regulation 4 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 in relation to internal control and how the council plans to address and implement all the recommendations reported in the Independent Governance Review of Guildford Borough Council SOLACE report.

The purpose of the governance framework

The governance framework comprises the systems, processes, culture, and values by which the authority is directed and controlled and the activities through which it accounts to, engages with, and leads the community. It enables the authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood and impact should those risks be realised and to manage those risks efficiently, effectively, and economically.

The governance framework has been in place for the year ended 31 March 2024.

The Council: How it works

All Councillors meet as the Full Council around six times a year. All meetings are open to the public but occasionally some items are held in private session due to the sensitive nature of the information to be considered (exempt information, as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972). The conduct of the Council's business is defined by formal procedures and rules, which are set out in the Constitution. The Constitution also explains the roles and responsibilities of the Executive, Audit, Overview & Scrutiny and Officer functions.

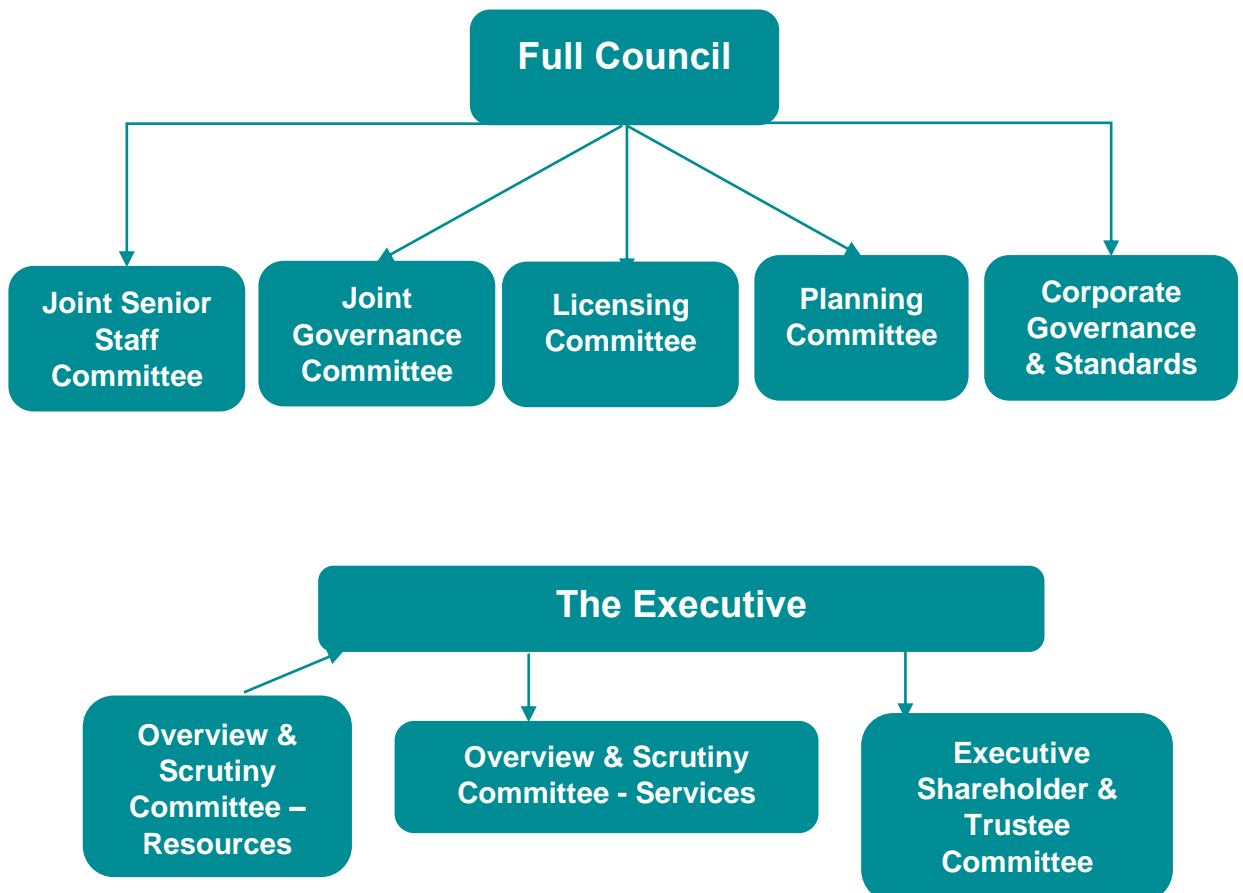
The 'Scheme of Delegation to Officers' sets out the basis on which Officers may take decisions under delegated authority. The Council also follows codes of Financial Management and Procurement and maintains codes of conduct for Councillors and Officers.

The Chief Executive is the Council's Head of Paid Service and is responsible for how the Council operates. The Chief Executive is assisted by the Corporate Leadership Board, which includes the four Strategic Directors. The Council is required to appoint a Monitoring Officer whose role includes ensuring that decision making is lawful and fair and a Section 151 Officer who is responsible for the Council's financial management.

The Council and its decisions are open and accessible. All reports requiring a decision are considered by appropriately qualified legal and finance staff before being considered by relevant decision-making forums.

In meeting the requirements of the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 the Council has also published on its website a wide range of open data and information.

Councillor Decision-Making



- Licensing – considers issues relating to taxis, entertainment, alcohol, food premises and miscellaneous licensing functions.
- Planning – makes decisions on development control issues, including applications for planning permission.
- Corporate Governance & Standards – independent committee responsible for audit, risk and governance arrangements, ethical standards, and the Constitution.
- All non-Executive Committees – helps develop and review policy and holds the Executive to account publicly by calling-in and scrutinising decisions made by the Executive.
- Executive - appointed by the Leader, responsible for proposing new policy, putting the budget to the Council and implementing and delivering the agreed policy framework and budget. The Executive also has responsibility for executive functions and the council's shareholder functions.
- Council - 48 elected Councillors, covering 21 wards. Appoints the Overview & Scrutiny and other committees. Approves the policy framework and budget.

Governance Principles

The Council is a complex organisation with an appropriately comprehensive governance framework that works in a dynamic environment and keeps its processes under constant review. A description of how the Council puts the principles of good governance, set out in the CIPFA/SOLACE framework into practice is set out in the following table along with recent achievements, developments, and areas for improvement.

- 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 entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
- Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
- Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability.

Changes in governance this year

A Corporate Governance Review was commissioned in early 2024 and undertaken by SOLACE.

The report from the review was published in May 2024 and concluded that the Council was at serious risk of failing in its statutory duty to deliver best value and their recommendations were designed to assist the Council to avoid such a failure.

A comprehensive corporate improvement plan has been put in place to address the issues raised.

The key elements of the plan are:

- Establishing clear strategic direction and values for the Council, providing a basis for performance management and continuous improvement.

- Ensuring we provide the best value for money by embedding effective finance practices with sufficient capacity, and alignment between the organisation's priorities and its use of resources, including procurement and contract management.
- Embedding a public service culture, outward-facing, innovative, building partnerships, listening to and working with our communities and businesses to deliver effective services that are value for money.
- Implementing effective governance across the organisation, so decisions are made at the right level, with clear accountabilities and responsibilities.
- Decision-making will be open and transparent, supported by evidence, and a committee system that provides constructive challenge.
- Ensuring effective service delivery, focused on achieving the right outcomes for residents and businesses, and supported by an effective performance reporting, risk-management, monitoring and audit regime.
- To ensure that housing services are effective, value for money, and recognise the vital importance of providing a safe and secure home.

Some governance improvements, such as a strengthening of the joint legal and governance function will have a beneficial impact.

To improve our governance, the SOLACE report recommended:

- Review the way the Council and the Executive operates (including individual Members) to ensure its agendas, reports, minutes and decision making reflects its role appropriately
- Review the way the Overview and Scrutiny Committee operates and plans its work and ensure it provides more effective oversight and constructive challenge which contributes to the Council's priorities and the improvement agenda,
- Review the terms of reference and title of the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee to ensure that the audit function is not marginalised or seen to be so
- Consideration should be given to the formation of a separate Audit Committee.
- the Council commissions and supports a development programme for Councillors, particularly for members in leading roles (Executive, Chairs and Vice Chairs of Committees and Group Leaders).
- that the corporate leadership arrangements are reviewed including the ways in which the Corporate Leadership Board works together and makes decisions, the range and roles of the various corporate management forums and the role of Strategic Directors,
- A performance management system is put in place across the authority for measuring the achievement of priorities, the delivery of services and management of budgets across the authority's services,
- The current HR policies and processes are reviewed and confirmed.
- That to enable decision-makers to be held to account effectively, the Council ensures that its schemes of delegation and decision-making protocols are reviewed regularly and that everyone concerned understands and follows them.

Investment will be required to improve governance across the Council and to strengthen both the finance and legal functions as part of the Improvement Plan. These will be built into our Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Principles of Good Governance	Arrangements the council has for delivering good governance	Recent Achievements	Planned improvements	Shortcomings in governance and remedial actions
Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law	<p>Constitution: sets out the how the Council operates; the roles and responsibilities of members, officers and the scrutiny and review functions; how decisions are made; and the procedures that are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. The Constitution is a live document that is subject to continuous review.</p>	<p>Constitution review – a review is underway to ensure its ongoing robustness, underpinned by a programme of training and regular monitoring.</p> <p>Councillors received a briefing note on Best Value duty in June 2024.</p>	<p>Constitution review – a review is underway to ensure its ongoing robustness, particularly as the council continues to collaborate with Waverley Borough Council. Examples include: Review terms of reference of all Committees, Review matters reserved to full Council and local choice functions, and review operation of the Executive.</p>	<p>Shortcomings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of clarity in decision-making processes due to inconsistent adherence to the Constitution. • Limited training on ethical governance and standards for members and officers. • Fragmentation in the roles of the Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer before 2024 changes. <p>Remedial Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement comprehensive training for members and officers on ethical standards and the Constitution. • Regular review and dissemination of the updated Constitution to ensure consistency in decision-making. • Reinforce the roles of the Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer with clearer terms of reference and direct reporting lines.
	<p>Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Monitoring Officer is a statutory appointment who is responsible for ensuring, among other things, that the Council, its officers, and its elected members, maintain the highest standards of conduct in all they do. • Whilst all Council Members and Officers have a general financial responsibility, s151 of the Local Government Act 1972 specifies that one Officer in particular must be responsible for the financial administration of the organisation and that this Officer must be CCAB qualified. 	<p>The Section 151 and Monitoring Officers report directly to the Chief Executive, a change in 2024.</p> <p>The Statutory Officers meet regularly with appropriate terms of reference, agendas and minutes.</p>		
	<p>Anti-fraud, bribery and corruption Our policy encourages staff and others to report any cases of suspected wrongdoing or misconduct, illegal acts,</p>	<p>An updated Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy was considered by the Corporate Governance & Standards Committee on 11 April</p>		

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	<p>or failure to act within the council, as part of its commitment to act with integrity and openness in the best interest of its residents and communities.</p>	<p>2024 and approved by the Executive at its meeting on 16 May 2024, alongside Money Laundering Policy Anti Bribery Policy, Counter Fraud Policy and Fraud Prosecution Policy. Key officers from Finance, Housing and Governance have recently attended fraud prevention and awareness training and are actively using the insight gained to improve the internal fraud control environment.</p>		
	<p>Whistleblowing: The Council is committed to achieving the highest possible standards of openness and accountability in all of its practices. The Council's Whistleblowing policy aims to encourage and enable anyone to raise issues of concern about suspected improper conduct in the way the council carries out its business. It aims to give staff, councillors and others, the confidence to raise concerns by assuring them that they can do so without fear of harassment, victimisation or reprisals. It also confirms the council's commitment to investigate and rectify any malpractice reported to us swiftly and thoroughly. The Policy is kept under review by the Monitoring Officer.</p>	<p>Whistleblowing Policy was adopted by the Executive at its meeting on 25 January 2024, with further updates by the Monitoring Officer presented to Corporate Governance & Standards Committee on 11 April 2024. An annual report on whistleblowing for 2023/24 was reported to the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee on 6 June 2024.</p>		

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	<p>Improvement Plan: Following a review, we have created a comprehensive improvement plan which sets out the steps we will take to stabilise our operations, governance and culture. Our journey to improvement - Guildford Borough Council</p>	<p>Appointment of an Independent Assurance Panel who will provide independent advice, challenge and expertise as we drive forward the delivery of our Improvement Plan.</p>	<p>Many actions as part of the Improvement Plan Our journey to improvement - Guildford Borough Council</p>	
	<p>Codes of conduct: Councillors and Officers must comply with their respective codes of conduct. Councillors must declare any pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests and gifts and hospitality on a public register. Similarly, officers must declare any financial interests, gifts or hospitality. Additionally, councillors are expected to declare any interests they may have in respect of any business on the agenda of every meeting that they attend in accordance with Council Procedure Rules.</p>	<p>Our joint protocol on councillor and officer relationships was adopted by Guildford and Waverley in July 2024, and training took place for councillors and staff across both councils.</p>	<p>Align codes of conducts and HR policies to the new Corporate Strategy</p>	

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Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement	<p>Engagement & Communication: It is recognised that people need information about what decisions are being taken locally, and how public money is being spent to hold the council to account for the services they provide.</p> <p>There are several ways people can get involved and connect with the council, many of which are listed on the council's website. Local people have the option to engage in a dialogue through: social media sites , the petition scheme, neighbourhood forums, council meetings (open to the public), and their local Councillor(s).</p> <p>The Council regularly engages with its employees to ensure they are kept informed about the council and the Borough. There are communication channels for "off-line" and online employees and a dedicated communications point of contact for staff.</p>	<p>New weekly staff briefing hosted by the Chief Executive or a Strategic Director. This has been introduced to encourage a more open, collaborative culture.</p> <p>Within housing, we have been strengthening our engagement with our Tenants Engagement Group (TEG). We had two sessions with TEG to discuss the improvement plans and to start creating the vision of TEG.</p> <p>Internal staff site on Guildford's Improvement Plan and external webpages on new corporate Strategy and Improvement Plan.</p> <p>Reinvigorated bi-weekly staff newsletter delivered by email. This focuses on issues important to colleagues.</p>	<p>As part of our new Corporate Strategy,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a communications strategy to enable us to most effectively communicate with residents and external stakeholders. • Develop a customer services strategy to ensure that the experience residents and other customers have of the council is always improving. • Develop a digital strategy to inform and guide our continuing digital transformation. • Develop a consultation and engagement strategy. • Consider the use of innovative tools and approaches for community engagement. • Carry out residents' surveys to understand the concerns and priorities of residents, as well as understanding how the council is performing. 	<p>Shortcomings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate communication channels leading to limited stakeholder engagement. • Gaps in public consultation and feedback mechanisms, resulting in a lack of trust. <p>Remedial Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement a robust communications strategy to enhance transparency and public trust. • Use innovative tools for community engagement and regularly conduct resident surveys to address stakeholder concerns. • Strengthen tenant and community engagement programs, such as the Tenants Engagement Group (TEG).
	<p>Complaints There is a clear and transparent procedure for dealing with complaints. If complainants remain dissatisfied, they have the right to refer the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman service or the Housing Ombudsman service.</p>	<p>We have reviewed our complaints within Housing, looking at volume and common themes. We have verified that our Complaints Policy was updated to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code from 1st April and the policy meets both the Housing</p>	<p>Review of how the Council resources, manages and responds to complaints, led by Communications & Customer Services.</p>	

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Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits		Ombudsman and LGSCO process. We also have all our Housing Stage 1, Stage 2 and Ombudsman complaints logged and tracked through the corporate complaints tracking software.		
	<p>Partnership working The authority works in partnership with local authorities and organisations including the collaboration with Waverley Borough Council working to streamline service delivery, learn from each other and innovate.</p> <p>Transformation and Collaboration Board meets monthly to progress the partnership objectives.</p>	We have now commissioned Local Partnerships to carry out an independent cost-benefit analysis on the Guildford and Waverley collaboration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration update to be presented to the Executive – Autumn 2024. • Developing combined strategies and policies with Waverley Borough Council where appropriate which will benefit the residents of the borough. • Maximise the potential that the collaboration with Waverley brings through carrying out joint procurement and service delivery where there is an economic case to do so. • Continue to work with strategic partners in the borough for the benefit of residents and businesses 	
	Our Corporate Strategy helps us state our <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose which brings all Members and officers together to work as one team pursuing a shared endeavour. • priorities which give direction to the organisation and provide the basis for managing the Council's performance. 	Our new Corporate Strategy was adopted at Full Council on 23 July which is the start of us setting clear strategic direction for the Council.	Number of strategies to be developed as outlined in our Corporate Strategy.	<p>Shortcomings:</p> <p>Unclear alignment between strategic priorities and resource allocation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delays in adopting key strategies to address

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> values which reflect the Council’s aspirations for the way it wishes to operate and provide the basis for the behaviours which all Members and officers are expected to demonstrate. 			<p>environmental and economic challenges.</p> <p>Remedial Actions:</p>
	<p>Resource planning and monitoring: The Council continues to operate in a climate of uncertainty created by prolonged inflation and its volatility, cost of living related increases in demand for services and the forthcoming review of the Local Government Funding system. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy is the mechanism through which the organisation seeks to address these issues and has been developed to respond to these very challenging circumstances.</p>	<p>The 2023/24 budget and MTFP underwent review during Q2/ Q3 to provide a balanced but achievable budget. Spend by services was reviewed and non-essential spend was approved by a panel. The MTFP approved in Feb 2024 was both robust and achievable. The monthly forecasting was implemented from month 4, reviewed and challenged by both officers and members and published online for residents and business to view.</p>	<p>September – workshops with budget holders about process, start of process overlaying strategy and aspirations September/October – Budget Challenge Sessions November – draft budget completed. January - Revenue and MTFS to CG&S January – Council Tax Leaflet review February 5th - Budget approved at Full council.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalise and implement strategies outlined in the Corporate Strategy, including a clear resource planning framework. Align the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) with sustainable development goals. Conduct regular performance reviews to measure progress against defined outcomes.

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Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes	<p>Local government achieves its intended outcomes by providing a mixture of legal, regulatory, and practical interventions.</p> <p>We have a number of mechanisms to support the council in delivering services which is flexible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project and programme management • Risk Management • Performance Management 	<p>Commenced the budget planning process, in accordance with objectives, strategies and the medium-term financial plan.</p> <p>New procurement and contract rules in July 2024.</p>	<p>Service Plans are being developed for all areas of the Council, which will act as a focal point for ongoing internal and external performance monitoring.</p> <p>Service challenge sessions for the budget planning 25-26</p>	<p>Shortcomings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent project and program management across departments. • Limited oversight in procurement and contract management processes. <p>Remedial Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a centralised project management framework with defined roles and responsibilities. • Strengthen procurement policies, including training programs and a robust Procurement Toolkit. • Enhance oversight mechanisms for contracts to ensure accountability and risk management.
Developing capacity, including the capability of leadership and the individuals within it	Council values: Everything we do is guided by our values. They set who we are as people, what we stand for and how we act. Our council values were chosen following engagement with staff.	Corporate Values were approved in May 2025.		

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	<p>Recruitment and induction: The Council operates a robust interview and selection process to ensure that Officers are only appointed if they have the right levels of skills and experience to effectively fulfil their role. New Officers must attend an induction session, which provides information about how the organisation works. Newly elected Councillors are required to attend an induction which includes information on roles and responsibilities; political management and decision-making; financial management and processes; health and safety; information governance; and safeguarding.</p> <p>All Officers are required to complete several mandatory e-learning courses including health and safety, equalities and diversity, financial rules, and information governance.</p>	<p>Initial restructure of JLT to address governance and finance capacity and capability.</p> <p>Redesignation of the S151 officer as a Strategic Director, reporting to the Chief Executive.</p> <p>Appointment of a permanent Section 151 Officer and other strategic directors.</p>	<p>A joint People Strategy is in the process of being developed. The new strategy will recognise that our staff are our greatest asset and will articulate how we will invest in them so that they have the skills and expertise needed to deliver on our priorities as set out in our new corporate strategy. The strategy will foster, promote, and nurture a positive, high performing culture that encourages and supports staff to innovate, challenge and achieve for our residents and businesses. It will also set out specific initiatives for how the council will manage recruitment and retention challenges.</p>	<p>Shortcomings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill gaps in leadership and management positions. • Challenges in recruitment and retention, impacting organisational capacity. <p>Remedial Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch a joint People Strategy to address recruitment, retention, and staff development. • Provide targeted training programs for senior leaders and committee chairs. • Establish clear career progression paths and regular staff engagement initiatives.
	<p>Staff retention and development: All Officers receive regular one to ones with their manager in order to monitor workload and performance. Opportunities are provided for identifying future training and development needs, and to track progress against objectives. The organisation encourages that everyone should have a PAM – Performance</p>	<p>We created a volunteer Improvement Champions group where staff from all levels of the organisation can input and feedback into the Council’s improvement journey, with the first meeting having taken place in May 2024.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out regular staff engagement activities, including staff surveys. • Support staff career progression through training and other development opportunities. • Support staff wellbeing at work through delivering a programme of wellbeing activities. 	

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	<p>Agreement Meetings – once a year. The process should ensure that staff are supported, and helped to maximise performance.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the establishment and operation of staff networks 	
<p>Managing Risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management</p>	<p>Risk Management: The council recognises that risk management is fundamental to effective governance and leadership and is similarly core to how the Council is managed and controlled. It is recognised that risk must be an integral part of all council activities and must be considered in all aspects of informed decision making.</p> <p>The council has an adopted risk management policy that sets out how the authority identifies, assesses, manages and monitors risks that threaten the delivery of objectives. Risk is reported to senior officers and the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee.</p> <p>Services are expected to maintain service risk registers, with risks identified during the annual service planning and budget setting process. Projects and programmes must also consider the risk implications of major projects.</p>	<p>As identified in the Solace governance review, however, it is acknowledged that improvements are required to the council's approach to risk management. While a new risk management strategy and methodology is in development (see next column), a number of interim improvements have been introduced in the 2024/25 financial year. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The introduction of a new, improved risk register template for the recording and reporting of corporate risk. The new risk register template has undergone presentational improvements to enhance the visibility of corporate risks, highlight the recent direction of travel, as well as ensuring that controls and mitigations are identified and with timescales for implementation set out. It 	<p>As noted, a new risk management strategy and methodology is being developed. The new strategy and methodology will improve the Council's strategic and operational approach to risk management, ensuring that it underpins effective governance and leadership at all levels of the council and will align with industry and sector best practice. The strategy and methodology are being developed in collaboration with Waverley Borough Council as Waverley's strategy is also due for review. The new strategy will include a risk appetite.</p> <p>In developing the new strategy, the council is working with Zurich Resilience Solutions, a leading risk management consultancy to the UK public sector. Zurich will also assist in the development of the risk appetite.</p>	<p>Shortcomings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ineffective risk management practices and outdated risk management frameworks. Financial challenges, including a need for stronger budget controls and improved reserves. <p>Remedial Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce a new risk management strategy. Enhance financial oversight by replenishing reserves and adopting transparent budget planning processes. Roll out a comprehensive performance management system tied to strategic objectives.

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		<p>also defines the level to where the risk owner is aiming to manage the risk.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate risks are now reviewed and reported on a quarterly basis. • Engagement with the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee on proposed improvements to the council's approach to risk management. 		
	Value for Money	<p>Emphasised accountability to the public purse, and value for money, through the Corporate Values.</p> <p>Financial Recovery Plan</p>	<p>Improved contract management alongside the new procurement legislation.</p> <p>Increased training and development of all members.</p> <p>The formulation of a service plan, linked to the Corporate Plan and values.</p>	
	Financial Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new Head of Procurement joined the council in June 2024, bringing knowledge in relation to procurement regulations and the Procurement Act 2023. • An updated Officer Scheme of Delegation was approved by Full Council on 23 July 2024. The updated scheme ensures its ongoing robustness in setting 	<p>We planned out the committee timetable for the Medium-Term Financial Plan 25/26 as part of the MTFP update at Full Council on 23 July. The work has already begun as we prepare for the budget setting approval in late spring 2025. Our budget planning will match our resources to our strategic priorities as set out in our</p>	

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		<p>out the responsibilities of officers and the limits of their decision-making powers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated Financial Procedural Rules and updated Contract Procedure Rules were approved by Full Council on 23 July 2024. • Replenish the Council’s reserves by at least £2m by April 2025. • Our accounts were formally closed and published, within the statutory deadline. 	<p>Corporate Strategy and inform the development of an annual Delivery Plan.</p> <p>Procurement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Corporate Procurement Strategy • a training package for officers and members • Procurement Toolkit provides the tools and guides to assist officers for all levels procurement. • Reviewing the need to have a central contracts database and to understand the risk/impact criticality of each contract. 	
	<p>Performance Management: Services report on a quarterly basis against a full set of performance measures which reflect the functions and objectives of the service.</p> <p>These measures are reported to Members and considered in detail at the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.</p>	<p>A new suite of KPIs is being developed alongside a revised reporting format, aligned to the new corporate strategy.</p>	<p>Our reporting from Q1 will be aligned with the priorities articulated in the new corporate strategy. This work will remain in progress and iterative. Once this is complete, we will focus our attention on service performance reporting and ensuring we use data and evidence to inform our decision making. In this vein, consideration is being given to improving the council’s and data insight capability.</p>	

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	<p>Data management: The organisation has a designated data protection officer and clear and established processes for ensuring data is handled appropriately.</p> <p>Data Protection and Information Security reports annually to the Corporate Governance & Standards Committee which includes an update on compliance with statutory requirements. The next report is due to be considered at committee on 26 September 2024.</p> <p>Data Protection training is a requirement for all staff to complete and is included in the council's induction training for new starters. Regular refresher training sessions are also offered to staff.</p> <p>ICT Users and Information Systems Security Policies are provided to new starters on their first working day as part of the induction process. They provide guidance on the proper usage of corporate IT resources.</p> <p>Information Risk Group identifies information related risk and provide advice on the effective management of all council-held information by ensuring</p>	<p>Information Assurance Officer joined the council in mid-May and will be reviewing council systems to ensure that teams and providers have appropriate security policies and procedures in place. The officer will also support services with data security issues and will provide skills and knowledge training.</p> <p>Privacy and Data Protection Policy – is in place and is due to be reviewed in 2025. It forms part of the council's Information Security Framework and is subject to review in the light of changes in the law and Information Commissioner's guidance. It sets out the roles and responsibilities of officers and is managed by the Information Governance Manager. The policy includes guidance on data breaches and the process to follow.</p>	<p>In recognition of the importance of information governance and data protection, a review of the service will be carried out to ensure it is appropriately resourced and is resilient. Any actions arising from this review will be addressed as necessary.</p> <p>The ICT user policy will undergo review to ensure it appropriately covers all data protection and information governance considerations.</p> <p>Joint Data Sharing Group (JDSG)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a new, fit for purpose data sharing agreement for the sharing of data between the two authorities. • Carry out data protection impact assessments for datasets and services. • Update key policies and procedures, including privacy notices to cover the processing of data. • Introduce an IT solution to improve the functionality and compliance of data sharing between the two councils. 	

Principles of Good Governance	Arrangements the council has for delivering good governance	Recent Achievements	Planned improvements	Shortcomings in governance and remedial actions
Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability	compliance with relevant legislation and effective risk management practices.			
	<p>Transparency The Council and its decisions are open and accessible to the community, service users, partners and its staff. All reports requiring a decision are considered by appropriately qualified legal, and finance staff with expertise in the particular function area before they are progressed to the relevant committee/group.</p> <p>To meet our responsibility to consider equality in decision-making, equality impact assessments are carried out on all major council services, functions, projects and policies in order to better understand whether they impact on people who are protected under the Equality Act 2010</p>	<p>Regular councillor updates on Guildford’s Improvement Plan</p> <p>Independent Assurance Panel</p>	<p>LGA Corporate Peer Challenge, an exercise where a team of local authority experts look at how we work as an organisation, is planned in 2025.</p>	<p>Shortcomings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient focus on audit functions within the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee. • Lack of effective scrutiny and challenge in committee operations. <p>Remedial Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a dedicated Audit Committee to focus on statutory audit responsibilities. • Redefine the terms of reference for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to enhance effectiveness. • Strengthen reporting frameworks and ensure timely and accurate data for decision-making.
	Effective Scrutiny	<p>Overview & Scrutiny Committee received training on 20 June from The Institute of Local Government Studies.</p> <p>Reviewed the effectiveness of the Council’s scrutiny function and abolished the Executive Advisory Boards and existing Overview & Scrutiny Committee and established two new Overview & Scrutiny Committees</p>	<p>Consider a dedicated Committee to be responsible for the statutory audit function of the Council</p>	

Signed

Councillor Julia McShane

Leader of the Council

20th February 2025

Signed

Pedro Wrobel

Chief Executive

20th February 2025