



Oxfordshire County Council Annual Governance Statement

2024/2025



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

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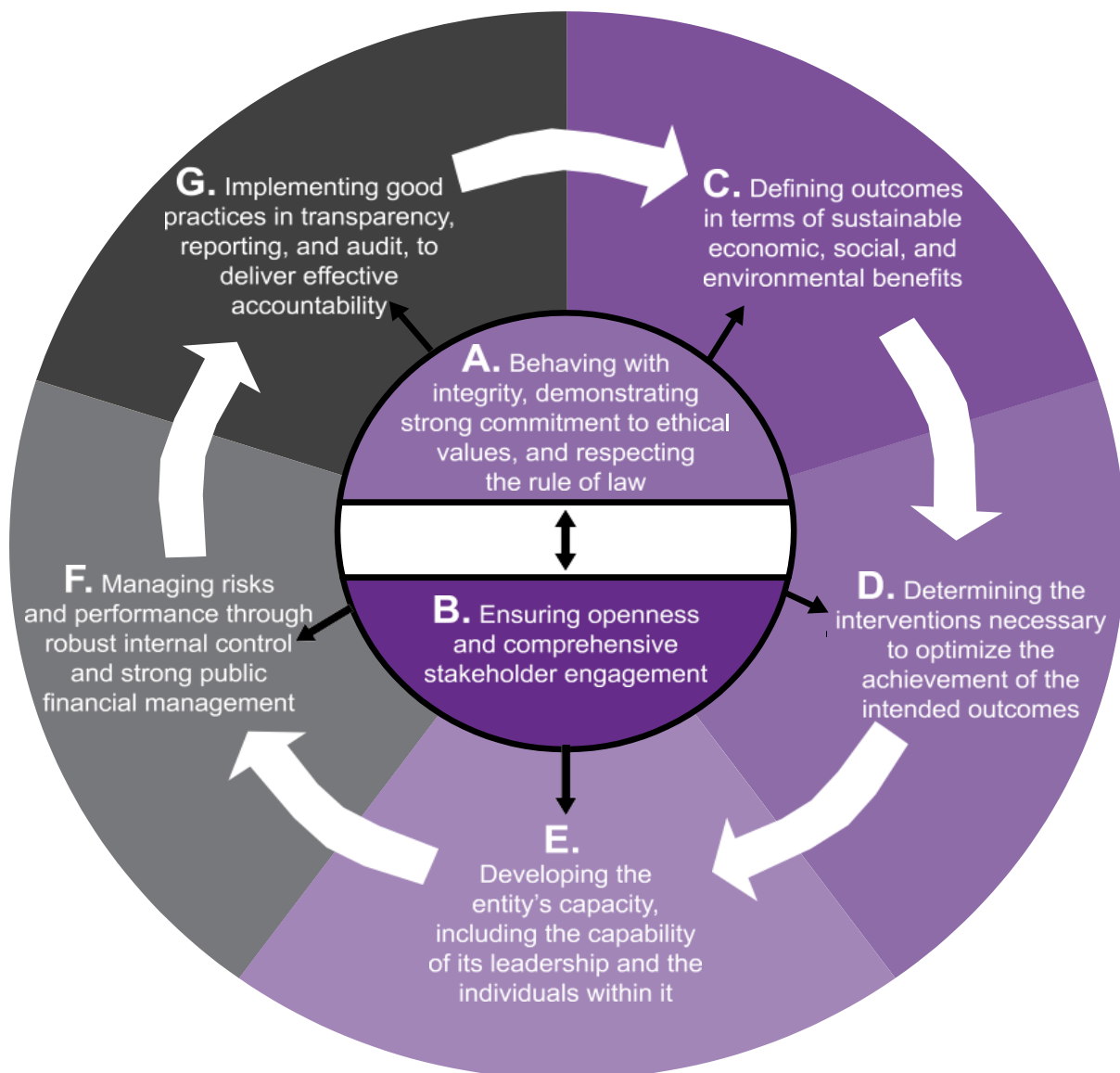
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Introduction

1. Oxfordshire County Council is obliged to ensure it has a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of its functions and the achievement of its aims and objectives; ensure that the financial and operational management of the authority is effective; and includes effective arrangements for the management of risk.
2. The purpose of the 2024/25 annual governance statement is to offer a comprehensive overview of the organisational frameworks and practices that ensure adherence to the principles of good governance as outlined by CIPFA Solace. The statement should provide transparency and accountability in decision-making processes, demonstrate robust internal controls, and promote ethical behaviour across all levels of the organisation. Additionally, the statement should provide insights into risk management strategies designed to mitigate potential challenges, outline the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement, and describe how the organisation fosters a culture of continuous improvement. The statement should also reflect on the mechanisms in place for monitoring and reviewing governance performance and highlight any significant changes or developments in the governance structure during the year.
3. In accordance with the Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the council has conducted a review of the effectiveness of its system of internal control in accordance with proper practice as set out in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice: Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (2016).
4. Whilst supporting the Council's arrangements for risk management, the governance framework cannot eliminate all risk to the achievement of policies, aims and objectives and this review can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.
5. Similarly, this review provides assurance that the council has in place appropriate processes to ensure transparency and democratic oversight in decision making.
6. This statement is guided by CIPFA Advisory Note One, "Understanding the Challenge to Local Authority Governance" (March 2022) and describes the council's governance framework, the steps that have been taken to ensure that it is effective and establishes key actions that will be put in place to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of the council's arrangements.
7. The review reflects enquiries made of officers with relevant knowledge, experience, and expertise. The review has been undertaken in consultation with the Council's Head of Paid Service, the Monitoring Officer, and the Executive Director of Resources (Section 151 Officer).

Governance Framework

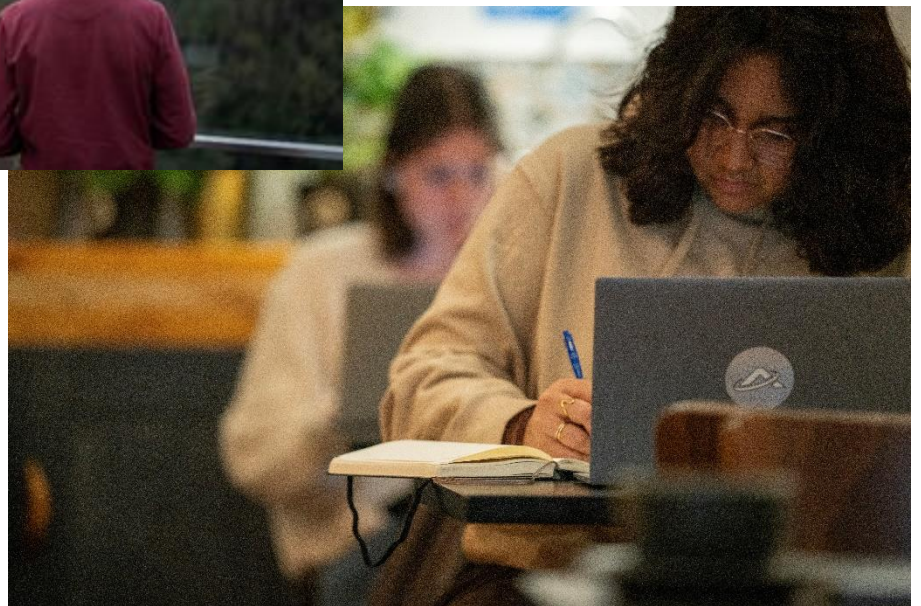
8. The governance framework at Oxfordshire County Council comprises the systems and processes, culture, and values which the council has adopted in order to deliver on the principles in the below diagram, (as taken from the [International Framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector](#) (CIPFA/IFAC, 2014) (the 'International Framework')). This illustrates the various principles of good governance in the public sector and how they relate to each other).
9. The council has a separate code of governance, "[the Oxfordshire Code of Corporate Governance](#)" which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SoLACE framework (2016). This is updated each year, approved by the Audit & Governance Committee and evidence actively collated and assessed for compliance. Compliance with the code was reported to the Audit and Governance Committee on 12 March 2025.



10. This Statement provides:

- a) An *opinion* on the Council's governance arrangements from the Council's Senior Officers, and signed by the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council

- b) A review of the *effectiveness* of the Council's governance arrangements during 2024/25
 - c) A *conclusion* in relation to the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements
 - d) A review of the *action plan* completed in 2024/25
 - e) An *action plan* for 2025/26
 - f) An *annex* summarising the Council's governance framework.
11. As previously stated, the Annual Governance Statement is required by Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and follows the best practice guidance from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting.



Assurance Statement

12. It is our opinion that the Council's governance arrangements in 2024/25 were adequate and provide a platform for achieving the Council's priorities and challenges in 2025/26.

Signatures

Signed on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council:



Martin Reeves
Chief Executive



Councillor Liz Leffman
Leader of the Council

Reviewing Our Effectiveness During 2024/25

Overview and review of overall effectiveness

13. The Council reviewed its overall effectiveness through an assessment of governance in all Services in late 2024 / early 2025. This required Directors to each work with their Leadership Teams to assess the level of assurance that they had in their service area regarding colleagues' awareness and compliance in the following areas:
- a) General Corporate Governance
 - b) Business Continuity
 - c) Customer Focus
 - d) Finance and Financial Management
 - e) Health and Safety
 - f) Human resources & Organisational Development
 - g) Information, Technology, Innovation and Digital
 - h) Information Services
 - i) Legislation
 - j) Performance Management
 - k) Procurement and contract management
 - l) Property and security
 - m) Risk Management
14. In addition to these assurance surveys, corporate lead statements were produced by service leads describing the governance in place during the 2024/25 year and highlighting areas of focus for 2025/26. Statements were produced for areas as noted above at paragraph 13.
15. The Council's Corporate Governance Assurance Group (CGAG), an officer working group, chaired by the Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer, will monitor any areas of focus throughout the year.
16. Any areas where issues were identified for development or improvement have been considered and will form part of the action plan for 2025/26.
17. In relation to the completion of the action plan for 2024/25, five of the seven action points were completed, with two requiring further work to be undertaken during 2025/26. The status of these actions is outlined in **Annex 1**. The progress on these actions was reported to the Audit and Governance Committee throughout the year.
18. Specific action points for 2025/26 are set out in **Annex 2**. The Council believes these actions will help to establish some improved practices arising out of its active learning and experience in 2024/25.
19. Details of how the Council's governance proved effective during 2024/25 can be found under the Service Issues section below (paragraph 66 onwards).

Governance Actions – Review of 2024/25 and priorities for 2025/26

20. The two annexes to this Annual Governance Statement summarise:

Annex 1: updates on the priority actions for 2024/25

Annex 2: actions for 2025/26

21. The Actions for 2024/25 in **Annex 1** highlight certain aspects of emerging governance that might not otherwise be apparent from work regularly reported to the Council's Audit & Governance Committee. As such, progress reports on these actions are reported to the Committee through the year. The Actions for 2025/26 in **Annex 2** will be monitored by the Corporate Governance Assurance Group (CGAG), and the Audit & Governance Committee.
22. Other governance and audit activity across the Council will continue to be reported to the [Audit & Governance Committee](#) through its normal work programmes

Governance in Outline

23. **Annex 3** sets out the Council's governance framework in outline. This framework was reviewed and updated in March 2025, by the Corporate Governance Assurance Group (CGAG).



Our Ambitions and People



Our strategic plan 2023 – 2025

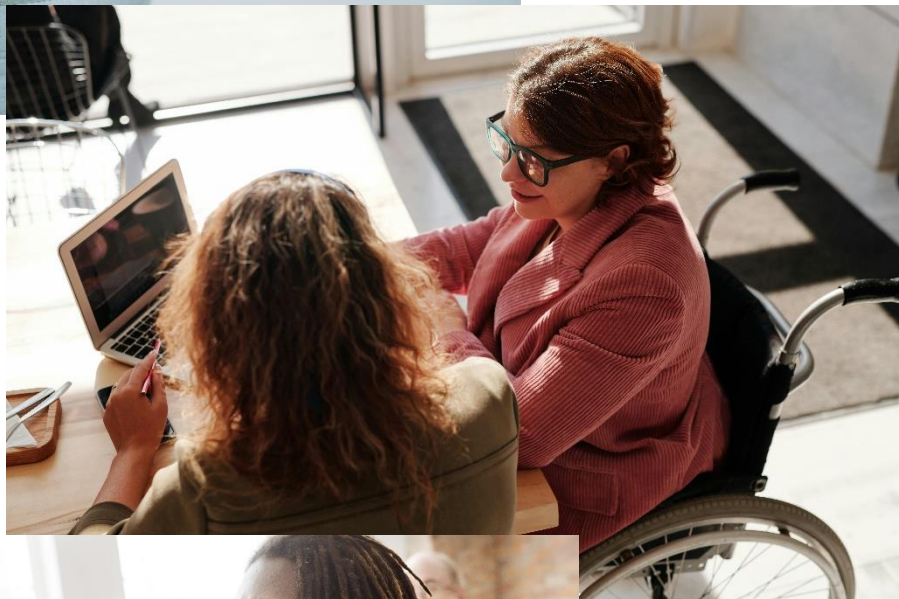
24. The Council's strategic plan 2023 – 2025 sets out a vision to lead positive change by working in partnership to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer, and healthier county.

25. The strategic plan sets out nine cross-cutting priorities and commitments to achieve the vision and the areas of focus. Our nine priorities are:

- i. Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work.
- ii. Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire.
- iii. Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents.
- iv. Support carers and the social care system.
- v. Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network.
- vi. Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces.
- vii. Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.
- viii. Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy.
- ix. Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit.

26. The plan sets out how the Council aims to achieve each priority and ways in which it will work with partners to create a more joined-up approach to delivering services.

27. Performance in delivering the overall strategy, including progress towards targets, supporting performance measures and budget, are reviewed regularly and communicated through the county council's business management and monitoring reports (BMMR).
28. The reports are then reviewed by the council's strategic leadership team, Cabinet, and by the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.



DELIVERING

the Future Together

Delivering the Future Together 2024/25

29. Over the past twelve months, Delivering the Future Together has evolved from a standalone programme of work into our internal vision for success and underpins everything we do.
30. We are on a journey to Deliver the Future Together and become an employer, partner and place shaper of choice. We are united in our commitment to support Oxfordshire's communities and help make the county a greener, fairer and healthier place.
31. Our five values underpin how we work with one another, with our partners and our residents:
- a) Always Learning.
 - b) Daring to do it differently.
 - c) Be kind and care.
 - d) Equality and Integrity in all we do.
 - e) Taking Responsibility.
32. Our network of more than 200 Delivering the Future Together Champions represents every service area. They are ambassadors for our values and help champion new ways of working.
33. To learn about our recent achievements and the difference we are making, [read our latest annual report](#). Some of recent highlights in 2024/25 include:
- a) Becoming a Council of Sanctuary, recognising our commitment to supporting refugees and asylum seekers.
 - b) Launching our Energy Saver App, helping residents save on their energy bills and reduce household emissions.
 - c) Holding our first citizens' assembly, bringing residents together to tackle the county's transport challenges.
 - d) Transforming our customer services by introducing Zoom.
 - e) Being one of the first councils to sign UNISON's anti-racism charter

Our statutory governance roles

34. The Council is required to appoint to three specific posts, each of which oversees a key aspect of the Council's governance.

- i. **Head of the Paid Service** (HOPS) role; responsible for how the Council's functions are delivered, and the appointment and proper management of staff.
– Throughout 2024/25 this has been and remains **Martin Reeves, Chief Executive**.
- ii. **Monitoring Officer** – and the Council's Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, throughout 2024/25 has been and remains **Anita Bradley**.
- iii. **'Section 151 Officer'** – the Chief Finance Officer, and Executive Director of Resources, throughout 2024/25 has been and remains **Lorna Baxter**: responsible for the financial management of the authority.

Deputy Chief Executives

35. The following two Executive Director roles are identified as Deputy Chief Executives providing direct support to the Chief Executive.
36. The **Executive Director of People & Transformation** and The **Executive Director of Resources**.
37. Each of the above postholders are an integral member of the Council's Strategic Leadership Team (SLT). As such, they are fully sighted on the Council's objectives, workstreams and emerging plans; and their perspectives and voices continue to be heard in, and to influence, this senior forum. In line with best practice, the Chief Finance Officer and the Monitoring Officer report directly to the Chief Executive.
38. The Executive Director of Resources and the Monitoring Officer both have open access to the Chief Executive at all times and meet regularly as statutory officers, together with the Executive Director of People & Transformation. The Executive Director of Resources and the Monitoring Officer carry a statutory responsibility to report issues to the Council, if needed. As such, these posts remain pivotal to the Council's good governance.
39. In July 2024 Lawyers in Local Government (LLG), CIPFA and SOLACE launched a new Code of Practice on Good Governance for Local Authority Statutory Officers following an extensive consultation process with the sector. The Code of Practice for Good Governance sets out expectations for the Chief Executive, Chief Financial Officer, and the Monitoring Officer in local authorities. The Code aims to support these roles to work effectively together and deliver good governance. They must recognise their responsibilities, understand the separation of powers, and display good governance. As there are higher expectations from individuals in these roles, the Code considers the seven Nolan Principles in conjunction with the "Golden Triangle"¹ to advise and guide them. The Seven Principles of the Golden Triangle are as follows:

- a) Respect Roles and Responsibilities

¹ The Golden triangle is the trio of statutory officers at the top of a local authority – the Head of Paid Service (typically the CEO), The s151 officer (typically the CFO or Director of Finance), and the Monitoring Officer. These roles are crucial for the governance and decision-making processes within a local authority – LLG.

- b) Act Wisely: A duty of enquiry and the exercise of statutory functions
- c) Be Robust in working arrangements
- d) Resource up: Get the tools to do the job
- e) Build resilience: Appointing Deputies
- f) Champion good decision making
- g) Effective Oversight: External companies and entities of the authority

40. The Council considers that it meets all the Principles and Best Practice set out in the Code and will continue to undertake an annual self-assessment against the Code.

Strategic Leadership Team

41. In February 2024 following a review of the leadership structure of the Council, a decision was taken to extend the membership of the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) to include all Service Directors. In turn this led to the decision to stand down the Council Management Team (CMT) which was established in 2023. The refreshed SLT comprising the fifteen most senior leaders will assume responsibility for the business previously taken through CMT, through a revised SLT Business process.

Risk Management

42. Throughout 2024/25 the Executive Director of Resources & Section 151 Officer had overarching responsibility for risk management. This function is led by the Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes and managed on a day-to-day basis by the Performance and Insight Team Leader.

43. The [Risk and Opportunities Management Strategy](#) was approved by the Audit and Governance committee and published in May 2023. This Strategy was developed with considerable input from SLT.

44. The Strategy is the foundation for the Council's approach to risk and opportunity management for the performance and risk management environment. This strategy is reviewed and updated where necessary on an annual basis. As well as collectively owning and supporting, the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) worked closely with the performance and Insight team to help implement the Strategy and embed risk management in the Council's everyday business delivering against the strategic priorities.

45. This strategy outlines the process of Identification, Assessment, Managing and Controlling and Review and Reporting of risks across the council. The following systems/mechanisms to ensure internal control have been in place throughout 2024/25 and are captured within the Strategy.



46. Cabinet is responsible for approving the Risk and Opportunities Management Strategy. The Audit and Governance Committee considered the draft Strategy and provided input and comments to Cabinet ahead of its approval. The Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes and Performance Team Leader supports the Group and services giving assurance around the escalation process into the Strategic risk register as necessary. The services are responsible for their operational risk registers.
47. The Performance and Insight team leader is working across all services, completing health checks to identify training needs and embed risk awareness and understanding of escalation and the link with 4-year business planning cycle.

Internal Audit in 2024/25

48. The 2019 CIPFA Statement on the “Role of the Head of Internal Audit in public service organisations” outlines the principles that define the core activities and behaviours that belong to the role of the ‘Head of Internal Audit’ and the governance requirements needed to support them. The Council’s arrangements conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA statement with our Chief Internal Auditor carrying out the following:
- a. objectively assessing the adequacy and effectiveness of governance and management of risks, giving an evidence-based opinion on all aspects of governance, risk management and internal control
 - b. championing best practice in governance and commenting on responses to emerging risks and proposed developments.
 - c. being a senior manager with regular and open engagement across the organisation, particularly with the leadership team and with the audit committee.
 - d. leading and directing an internal audit service that is resourced appropriately, sufficiently, and effectively.
 - e. being professionally qualified and suitably experienced.
49. The Internal Audit Service operates in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). The self-assessment against the standards is completed on

an annual basis. It is a requirement of the PSIAS for an external assessment of internal audit to be completed at least every five years. This took place in November 2023 and the results were reported to the Audit & Governance Committee in January 2024. This confirmed that the “service **fully conforms** to the requirements of the standards. There were no areas of either partial or non-conformance with the standards identified and no recommendations arising. From April 2025 the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards will be replaced by the Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector.

50. The Chief Internal Auditor prepared an Annual Report on the work of Internal Audit which concludes for the 12 months ended 31 March 2025, there is satisfactory assurance regarding Oxfordshire County Council's overall control environment and the arrangements for governance, risk management and control. Where issues have been identified through internal audit review, they have worked with management to agree appropriate corrective action and timescale for improvement.
51. As part of governance arrangements between Oxfordshire County Council and the Hampshire Partnership/Integrated Business Centre (IBC), Hampshire provide annual assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control from the work carried out via the IBC. This is provided through a commissioned Service Organisation Controls review under ISAE 3402. (International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board –which provides a framework for reporting on the design and compliance with control objectives related to financial reporting). The report for 2024/25 concludes that the key financial system controls were suitably designed and operated effectively, with no exceptions noted.
52. Where Internal Audit identifies areas for improvement, management action plans are in place and are routinely monitored by the Internal Audit team and the Audit Working Group. Managers are required to provide positive assurance that actions have been implemented; performance on implementation is high, demonstrating that control weaknesses identified by Internal Audit are being addressed on a timely basis.

Financial Management Code ('FM Code')

53. A key goal of the Financial Management Code of Practice (launched by CIPFA in November 2019) is to improve the financial resilience of organisations by embedding enhanced standards of financial management. In accordance with the CIPFA Financial Management (FM) Code, local authorities should disclose compliance with the FM Code in the AGS and identify any outstanding areas for improvement or change.
54. There are clear links between the FM Code and the Governance Framework, particularly with its focus on achieving sustainable outcomes. As set out in the council's Financial Strategy for 2025/26, an assessment has been made of the Council's current compliance with the Code for 2024/25 (See Annex 4).
55. The assessment identified that 15 of the 17 standards were assessed as green and two as amber meaning that compliance can be evidenced.

56. The two standards assessed as amber (see references A and E in the assessment at annex 4) are expected to be addressed through the council's Commercial Transformation Programme and the Business Services Transformation Programme and the council's strategy for data and insight.

Procurement and Contract Management

57. The Procurement Act 2023 received royal assent in October 2023 and came into force on 24 February 2025. This legislation is applicable to all new procurement activity from 24 February 2025 onwards. The procurement team and legal teams have attended training given by central government to ensure that they are all aware of the new legislation how it would apply to the Council's procurement activities. This knowledge and information is being shared with colleagues across the Council and the Contract Procedure Rules have been amended as necessary to be compliant with the change in legislation.
58. The Commercial Board was established in January 2024 to challenge and discuss all new tender requirements and contract renewals. Membership currently comprises the Director of Financial and Commercial Services (Chair), Head of Commercial and Procurement Service, Head of Legal and Governance or named substitute, Head of Law and Legal Business Partner (Contracts and Conveyancing), Head of Climate Action, Head of Highway Maintenance, Capital Programme Manager, Head of Innovation and Strategic Property Advisor (consultant). Services present tender requirements, contract renewals in excess of £1m and income generating opportunities to this group to ensure that the most commercial route forward is identified wherever possible. It also provides an opportunity to identify any cross-directorate synergy and opportunities not easily seen at operational level.

Customer Experience

59. The Customer Experience function can be split into two areas for governance, the Customer Service Centre (CSC) and the Continuous Improvement Team (CIT). Both areas have their own governance structure with overall responsibility from the CSC Management team which comprises the Director for Transformation, Digital and Customer Experience, Head of Customer Experience, Service Delivery Manager and Quality & Performance Manager.
60. The Council's operating model has determined that customer contact work should be assessed for self-service opportunities, automation and if any processes should be dealt with by the CSC and a transformation programme is in place. This aspect forms one part of the wider 'Improving the Customer Experience' strategy which is now embedded in the Council's transformation agenda.
61. As part of the new ways of working to deliver the future together, there is now an 'Improving the Customer Experience' programme board which is responsible for the development of the council's customer experience approach.

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

62. The council is addressing significant opportunities and challenges related to devolution and local government reorganisation.
63. In December 2024 the Government published the Devolution White Paper, outlining significant reforms to local government, marking the most substantial changes since the Local Government Act 1972. The paper advocates for the creation of new unitary authorities in two-tier areas like Oxfordshire and Strategic Authorities across England, with a strong emphasis on the mayoral model of devolution.
64. In January 2025 the Cabinet resolved to request a place on the local government reorganisation and devolution fast track programme, however in February 2025 the Government informed Oxfordshire County Council that it had not been successful in obtaining a place on the fast track and that elections would go ahead as scheduled on 1 May 2025. At the same time, the County Council and all other Councils in Oxfordshire were sent the statutory invitation to prepare proposals to reorganise local government across Oxfordshire. The Cabinet submitted three proposals to Government in March 2025, indicating a preference by the County Council for a single county unitary.
65. Oxfordshire County Council continues to work on its proposals for local government reorganisation and devolution to a new strategic authority. The timetable for local government reorganisation is tight, with final proposals due in November 2025, an expected decision in Spring 2026 from Government on the new structure for Oxfordshire, the creation of a shadow authority by April 2027, elections to the shadow authority in May 2027, and the new authority becoming operational in April 2028. Whilst there is no fixed timetable for devolution it is expected that an initial proposal will be submitted by the Autumn 2025.

Service Issues

Human Resources

66. The Our People and Culture Strategy outlines the vision of the service which is “We develop and maintain a high performing, innovative, highly engaged and agile teams, employing the best people, and reflecting the communities we serve. We nurture an environment that supports diversity, equality and inclusion, and allows all our employees to bring their whole selves to work to deliver great services for our Oxfordshire residents.”
67. HR policies and procedures that aim to support staff and managers on workforce matters are available on the intranet. These policies are subject to regular review and are updated to ensure compliance with relevant legislation where applicable. As well as ensuring compliance with employment legislation the policies and procedures aim to reflect good employment practice and support fairness and consistency as part of our inclusive culture. The Our People and Culture Strategy consists of a programme of work to modernise and update existing policies and procedures and develop new

policies and procedures to support current employment challenges to ensure managers are provided with more practical advice about their responsibilities for managing their teams and services.

68. A new recruitment applicant tracking system (ATS), Tribepad, was introduced in August 2024. All recruitment is now completed in house (previously through a self-service system called the Integrated Business Centre (IBC)). A new team has been recruited and are being trained to enhance and improve the new recruitment requirements of the organisation. The team are working to continuously enhance and improve the new processes as a second phase of the ATS project.
69. A new managed service provider, Hays Specialist Services commenced on 25 November 2024 to provide more direct filling of agency worker requirements at a reduced cost.
70. IR35 legislation requires employers to monitor future and existing use of self-employed workers. Steps to ensure IR35 assessments are carried out for every agency/interim worker and will continue in line with any legislative requirements. In February 2025 additional training was provided to over 130 managers to further improve understanding of IR35.
71. The Learning and Development (L&D) plan is aligned to business priorities through a stakeholder engagement process. The stakeholder group is regularly reviewed to ensure robust engagement across the organisation. During 2024-25, the L&D plan was reviewed and signed off by each Service Leadership Team ensuring plans are aligned to business priorities. L&D funding is continually being reviewed to ensure delivery for high priority / high impact development. For mid-2025 the council will have created a new operating model within HR with the focus to further drive needs-based learning aligning to business priorities.

Capital Governance

72. Since the introduction of new governance measures in 2022, there has been a commitment to continuously improve upon what is already in place. An ongoing programme of work is aiming to build upon these foundations, enabling efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness across all areas of Capital Programme governance. Since the last report, a new reporting tool has been implemented across the capital programme, providing enhanced visibility of projects and programmes in delivery. Comprehensive reporting now enables programme boards to exercise better control over delivery of projects and programmes. Additionally, a new centralised repository has been established for all pre-pipeline capital schemes. This provides an organisation-wide view of all pre-pipeline capital schemes, enabling senior leaders to take proactive decisions to expedite priority schemes into delivery and to take early action to address barriers to delivery. A comprehensive review is currently being undertaken to redefine workflows, gateways and governance with a particular focus on pre-pipeline activity. Once complete, the Capital Governance Handbook will be refreshed to include this updated information.
73. There are Capital Programme Boards established for Major Infrastructure, Highways, Property, IT & Digital and Environment & Climate which report into the Strategic

Capital Board (SCB), chaired by the Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer. The SCB meets monthly and provides a collective officer oversight of capital projects within the Capital Programme. The Board functions as an internal governance requirement, complementary to the Council's democratic process and makes recommendations to an executive decision-maker to an Officer, Cabinet Member or Cabinet.

74. The Board oversees the performance of the Council's Capital Programme and addresses risks and / or issues through reporting with a focus on variations in time, scope, and cost, ensuring the programme delivers value for money and reflects the strategic priorities of the Council. It also reviews the drafted annual Capital Programme ahead of consideration and approval by the Council as part of the business planning process. The Board may also recommend to executive decision-makers, any new in-year additions to the Capital Programme that are greater than £500,000 that have not been considered through the annual business planning process.

Adult Social Care

75. Adult Social Care (ASC) continues to make a positive impact on people's lives, by delivering its vision 'The Oxfordshire Way' which focuses on supporting people to live well in their community, remaining independent for as long as possible. The Community Capacity Grant and Connect Communities Fund, co-funded by Adult Social Care and Public Health, are prime examples of how ASC is implementing this vision. These funds, totalling £500,000, along with an additional £97,000 raised by donors from the Oxfordshire Community Foundation, have supported 94 projects aimed at ensuring residents have access to essential services within their communities. The primary goal of these initiatives is to promote independence among residents and reduce their reliance on formal statutory services.
76. Alongside this ASC has had great success in reducing the number of people awaiting a social care assessment, down 77% compared to April 2021. The longest waiting time has also fallen in the same period by 80%. The Discharge to Assess approach continues to support a high proportion of people to return directly to their own homes and access reablement following a hospital stay, with 25% more people discharged home from hospital this year compared to last and 85.5% of people achieving independence or a reduction in the amount of care support they require.
77. The Health and Care Act 2022 introduced a new duty for the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to independently review and assess how local authorities are delivering their Care Act functions. In January 2025, the CQC conducted an on-site Local Authority Assessment in Oxfordshire. A total of 179 individuals were interviewed, including leadership, officers, residents, local partners and service providers. This assessment provided a valuable opportunity to celebrate the service's successes and discuss areas where the Council is committed to further development. The final assessment report is expected in early 2025/26.

Children and Young Peoples Services

78. Performance and management of outcomes for the Children's Education and Families service (CEF) continues to be statutorily compliant. The service performance is maintained from the good rating in the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACs) inspection of February 2024, the service's ongoing progress is sense checked against a range of performance data and quality assurance mechanisms, including external peer reviews.
79. Key performance indicators across CEF continue to benchmark well with statistical neighbours and those Local authorities judged good or better.
80. The SEND Improvement and Assurance Board continues to report to the [Department for Education](#) and NHS England. This involves a number of deep dives and stocktake reviews of progress and evidence against an improvement framework. The outcome of which has shown incremental progress and improvement since the July 2023 inspection.
81. Internal governance and leadership stability has increased as a result of a 2024/25 continuous improvement plan and permanency in the senior leadership.

Economy and Place

82. Developer Funding - Oversight and delivery of s106 and related infrastructure funding has been subject to significant review of processes, governance, and improvement to the visibility. This programme of work was reported into the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April and November 2024, with a written update received in February 2025 (having first been brought to Committee in December 2023). Increased transparency and use of data will improve leadership grip of delivery and enable members to more effectively hold the council to account.

Environment and Highways

83. During 2024/25 a new Highways Maintenance Contract was procured and awarded, commencing 1 April 2025.

Public Health

84. In 2024/25, Oxfordshire launched its Marmot Place Programme, including stakeholders from across health, care, academia, and communities. There are three Marmot principles which will form the initial focus on this work and the governance for delivery of the programme is currently being put in place. This includes work programmes for each of the three principles, with support from the Marmot Steering Group, and oversight from the Marmot Advisory Board. The Advisory Group met for the first time in March 2025.
85. The launch of the 2024-2030 Health and Wellbeing Strategy [New strategy aims to improve health outcomes for all](#) - The strategy has 10 priorities derived from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and collaboratively agreed upon following a public and partner consultation that included over 400 responses as well as proactive

engagement with over 1,000 residents, many from seldom heard communities. An outcomes framework was agreed in March 2024 that are monitored by a range of partnership forums relevant to the indicator with overall accountability held by the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Law & Governance

86. The Monitoring Officer provided her [annual report to the Audit and Governance Committee](#) on the Council's governance arrangements. This review was formally reported to and endorsed by the Audit & Governance Committee on [18 September 2024](#). This report confirmed the progress in maintaining democratic accountability and transparency, with members continuing to undertake their role as community leaders.
87. The Constitution Working Group met between November 2024 and February 2025 and proposed amendments to the Constitution. A small number of additional changes were agreed by the Audit & Governance Committee and the Oxfordshire Health & Wellbeing Board ahead of presenting a report of all proposed amendments to Council on 1 April 2025 which was approved. The Constitution has been updated to reflect these changes. The Democratic Services team has a working group to effect these changes to the decision-making processes of the Council.
88. Schemes of Delegation are set out in the Constitution as standing delegations. Services operate their business by way of sub-delegations. These sub-delegations are required to be recorded by the Directors and a public document held by the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer. The Director of Law and Governance is assisting Directors to record their sub-delegations following changes to the Council's structure from the Tier 3/ 4 restructure, implemented on 16 December 2024. Updated schemes of delegations will be completed during 2025-2026.
89. The county council elections will be held on 1 May 2025. County elections are held every 4 years. These elections will determine the political composition of the county council. The outcome will influence policy priorities and the allocation of resources, impacting the day-to-day lives of residents. As new councillors take office on 6 May 2025, their visions and mandates will steer the county's direction.
90. Key officers within the council have completed CIPFA's online whistleblowing training. Internal Whistleblowing Training is in development following the refresh of the council's whistleblowing policy and will be rolled out via the council's learning platform during 2025/26.
91. A review and update of the Conflicts of Interest and Gifts & Hospitality policies has been completed.
92. Information Governance - The Information Governance Board chaired by the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer met on a regular basis to ensure that the Council has adequate arrangements for data protection and information security. The Board includes the Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO), Caldicot Guardian and Data Protection Officer and reports to the SLT. The Information Governance Group

has an operational role in looking at data breaches and security incidents in more detail and highlighting risk areas that need to be addressed through Council-wide training. The Group comprises representatives from across the Council and refers matters to the Board as appropriate.

Fire & Community Safety

93. In the past year, Oxfordshire County Council's Fire and Community Services have continued to uphold the highest standards of safety and service delivery. A significant milestone was the inspection conducted by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in early 2024. The inspection highlighted the strengths of the service, including operational response, prevention and protection services, and the culture within the organisation. The governance of the improvement actions is overseen by the Fire Improvement Board, supported by the HMI Service Liaison Lead and the executive leadership of the council. This structured approach ensures that the service continue to meet the improvement expectations set out by HMICFRS.
94. The Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Community Safety Plan outlines the strategic priorities and long-term plans for managing and reducing risks from fire, road traffic collisions, and other emergency incidents within Oxfordshire. This plan is a cornerstone of the council's commitment to protecting the community, reducing harm, and saving lives through a combined approach of protection, prevention, and response. It also supports local and national resilience as detailed in the Civil Contingencies Act. The plan sets out clear objectives and performance measures, ensuring that the council remains accountable and transparent in its service delivery. By aligning efforts with the Community Safety Plan and the Oxfordshire County Council Strategic Plan, the council is dedicated to fostering a safer and more resilient Oxfordshire for all residents.

Inspections Review: Readiness and Sharing Learning

95. A review of inspections activity across the Fire Service, Adult Social Care and Children, Education and Families was conducted from November 2024 to February 2025. This sought to understand how learning is currently shared following inspections, along with strengths and development areas in the council's approach to inspections more generally.

Stakeholders were interviewed, which identified a variety of inspection experience and maturity across the organisation. There are opportunities for more mature areas to collaborate with others to share their expertise, which has been done effectively between Children Education & Families and Adult Social Care to support the recent CQC inspection, particularly around logistics.

96. The recommendations include creating a mechanism to share inspection recommendations across different assurance leads, and providing opportunities for assurance leads to share lessons learned. Other recommendations include exploring digital solutions for data and document collection, and internal communications and

Delivering the Future Together campaign to encourage a whole-council approach to inspections. An action plan has been created for 2025/26.

Enterprise Oxfordshire & establishment of a shareholder committee

97. Triggered by a change in Government policy announced during the spring budget in 2023 – from 1 April 2024 – it was decided at a national level that the function of Local Enterprise Partnerships, would be delivered through a mechanism agreed by respective upper-tier local authorities.
98. On 1 April 2024 Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership Limited (OxLEP) became a county council owned company.
99. In November 2024, an agreement with Oxfordshire County Council was reached, ensuring OxLEP could continue to deliver economic development functions across Oxfordshire and from 1 April 2025, it will trade under the name of Enterprise Oxfordshire.
100. By reaching this agreement, OxLEP can continue to provide business, skills, investment, and trade support services to the county's business community. Additionally, it will support various plans aimed at ensuring Oxfordshire's economic potential is achieved sustainably and inclusively, benefiting businesses, communities, and the environment.
101. While restating its expectations that functions previously held by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) continued, Government confirmed in March 2025 that there will be no further funding available, with the responsibilities shifted to upper-tier authorities.
102. During 2024/25 revised governance and board membership arrangements were developed and reported to Cabinet in November 2024, with a Shareholder Committee established from December 2024 to exercise the council's shareholder functions for OxLEP (renamed Enterprise Oxfordshire from April 2025) and any other future company structures developed or joined.
103. Income and spending for 2025/26 has been agreed through a Business Plan submitted to the Shareholder Committee in March 2025. From 2024/25 group accounts will be required to incorporate the accounts for the Enterprise Oxfordshire company into the County Council's Statement of Accounts. In its April 2025 meeting, the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny committee recommended that the Audit and Governance Committee should review the governance arrangements of Enterprise Oxfordshire in a year's time, including examples of how decisions were made throughout the year. It also proposed that the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee should review the performance of the organisation in a year to assess how well the new model has delivered its business plan. Cabinet will consider these recommendations at the next opportunity.

Conclusion

104. The Council's governance arrangements are regarded as fit for purpose and will be monitored throughout 2025/26.

Annex 1 - Significant Governance Issues – 2024/25 Actions Update

Actions identified for 2024/25 - Update

This is a review of the progress during 2024/25 on the priorities for that year. The actions identified were completed in-year

Actions that were planned for 2024/25	Original Timescale	Outcome
1. Constitution Working Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To establish a member working group to work alongside the officer working group, To continue the review of the Council's Constitution. 	31 March 2025	The Constitution Working Group met between November 2024 and February 2025 and proposed amendments to the Constitution. A small number of additional changes were agreed by the Audit & Governance Committee and the Oxfordshire Health & Wellbeing Board ahead of presenting a report of all proposed amendments to Council on 1 April 2025 which was approved. Training and guidance will be rolled out to officers.
2. HR policies to be reviewed and updated for 2024/2025 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisational Change policy Redeployment policy Redundancy procedure Fixed Term /Temporary contracts of employment policy TUPE guidance Pensions and Retirement policy 	30 June 2024 30 June 2024 30 June 2024 30 June 2024 30 June 2024 30 June 2024	All stated policies have been reviewed and published.

Annex 1 - Significant Governance Issues – 2024/25 Actions Update

Actions that were planned for 2024/25	Original Timescale	Outcome
<p>3. Directorate level Schemes of Delegation,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To continue with the review and update of the Directorate Schemes of Delegation • Directorate level Schemes of Delegation, which are held both by individual Directorates and centrally, require further review to reflect the recent changes in reporting arrangements. 	31 March 2025	<p>The former Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer et with colleagues in HR and Finance to consider their updates to schemes of delegation which will form the greater part of individual Service schemes. This will enable the production of a pro forma scheme of delegation which can be provided to individual Services and meetings will then be arranged for Governance officers and Directors/Deputy Directors as necessary to support them in producing final schemes of delegation. This work will continue into 2025/26.</p>
<p>4. Further consideration of the Information Commissioner's Office's (ICO) expectations when handling Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulation requests.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During 2023/24 the Council improved its compliance rates in respect of meeting statutory response deadlines. The Customer Feedback Team (FOI Officers) need now to work with services to improve the quality of responses to requests, and the handling of requests in accordance with FOI/EIR legislation, to further improve resolutions ahead of any ICO involvement. • Officers in the Customer Feedback team to work with the Corporate Governance Team on increasing awareness within the Council on the correct application of the legislation. 	31 March 2025	<p>Officers have continued to provide advice to ensure compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). Services are encouraged to strengthen their responses by considering the ICO's Guidance and Decision Notices. Full and thorough consideration is given to each individual request.</p> <p>Key officers meet regularly to discuss current caseloads, themes and compliance. These meetings are extended to specific service areas where themes occur. This provides opportunity to work through a request and ensure legislation is applied correctly.</p> <p>Quality assurance is undertaken by Officers on responses to requests for information before they are sent to ensure they fully address the request. If any request has not been adequately answered, it is referred to the responding managers for revision. Consequently, the number of internal reviews is</p>

Annex 1 - Significant Governance Issues – 2024/25 Actions Update

Actions that were planned for 2024/25	Original Timescale	Outcome
		<p>decreasing due to the increased accuracy of responses before their release at the initial stage.</p> <p>In 2024/2025 the council achieved a compliance rate of 97.5% of FOI and EIR requests for information being responded to within the statutory 20 working day timeframe. Above 95% compliance is rated at the ICO's highest level "Good". The council will work to ensure it maintains this standard of compliance in future years.</p> <p>Officers continue to attend ICO workshops as well as undertake benchmarking exercises against other local authorities to review best practice and update internal guidance.</p>
<p>5. Full review of current CCTV & intruder alarm monitoring arrangements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of an ongoing initiative to increase self-delivery of services, provide a detailed options paper for CCTV & Intruder alarm monitoring to be self-delivered vs. the current outsourced model. 		<p>Complete. Revised policy and procedure implemented.</p>
<p>6. Review of Members' and Officers' fiduciary responsibilities and accountability, and legal status in respect of outside bodies including indemnities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is important that the legal status of and responsibilities and accountabilities of Members are clearly understood in relation to outside bodies they are 	<p>31 March 2025</p>	<p>This remains outstanding and will carry over into 2025/26.</p>

Annex 1 - Significant Governance Issues – 2024/25 Actions Update

Actions that were planned for 2024/25	Original Timescale	Outcome
appointed to by the Council.		
<p>7. Proactive Training for Governance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance sessions to raise awareness and skills level within the Organisation to be carried out by Heads of Governance and Legal. • Following a review of the Governance policies, training materials are in development which will be published and used in Governance sessions, including raising awareness about the Council's whistleblowing process and amended policy. 	31 March 2025	<p>Following a review of the Governance policies, training materials are in development which will be published and used in Governance sessions, including raising awareness about the Council's whistleblowing process and amended policy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training sessions have been held for officers relating to decision-making including compliance with legal requirements around key decisions. • Key officers were booked onto CIPFA's Whistleblowing eLearning training. Colleagues were asked to complete the training by 31 January 2025. Completion has been overseen by line managers, and the Governance Team will hold a central record for all officers. • Further in-house whistleblowing eLearning material is in development and will be rolled out across the organisation during 2025-2026.

Annex 2 - Significant Governance Issues - 2025/26

Actions identified for 2025/26

	Action now planned for 2025/26	Timescale for Completion	Outcome	Senior Responsible Officer
1.	Schemes of Delegation Work is still being undertaken with the new services formed as a result of the Tier 3/ 4 restructure, implemented on 16 December 2024.	31 March 2026	To complete schemes of delegation for each service area.	Director of Law & Governance, and Monitoring Officer
2.	Review of Members' and Officers' fiduciary responsibilities and accountability, and legal status in respect of outside bodies including indemnities. It is important that the legal status of and responsibilities and accountabilities of Members are clearly understood in relation to outside bodies they are appointed to by the Council.	31 March 2026	To review and update.	Head of Legal and Governance
3.	Contract Management	31 March 2026	The introduction of the contract management framework will define the corporate approach to the segmentation of	Director of Financial and Commercial

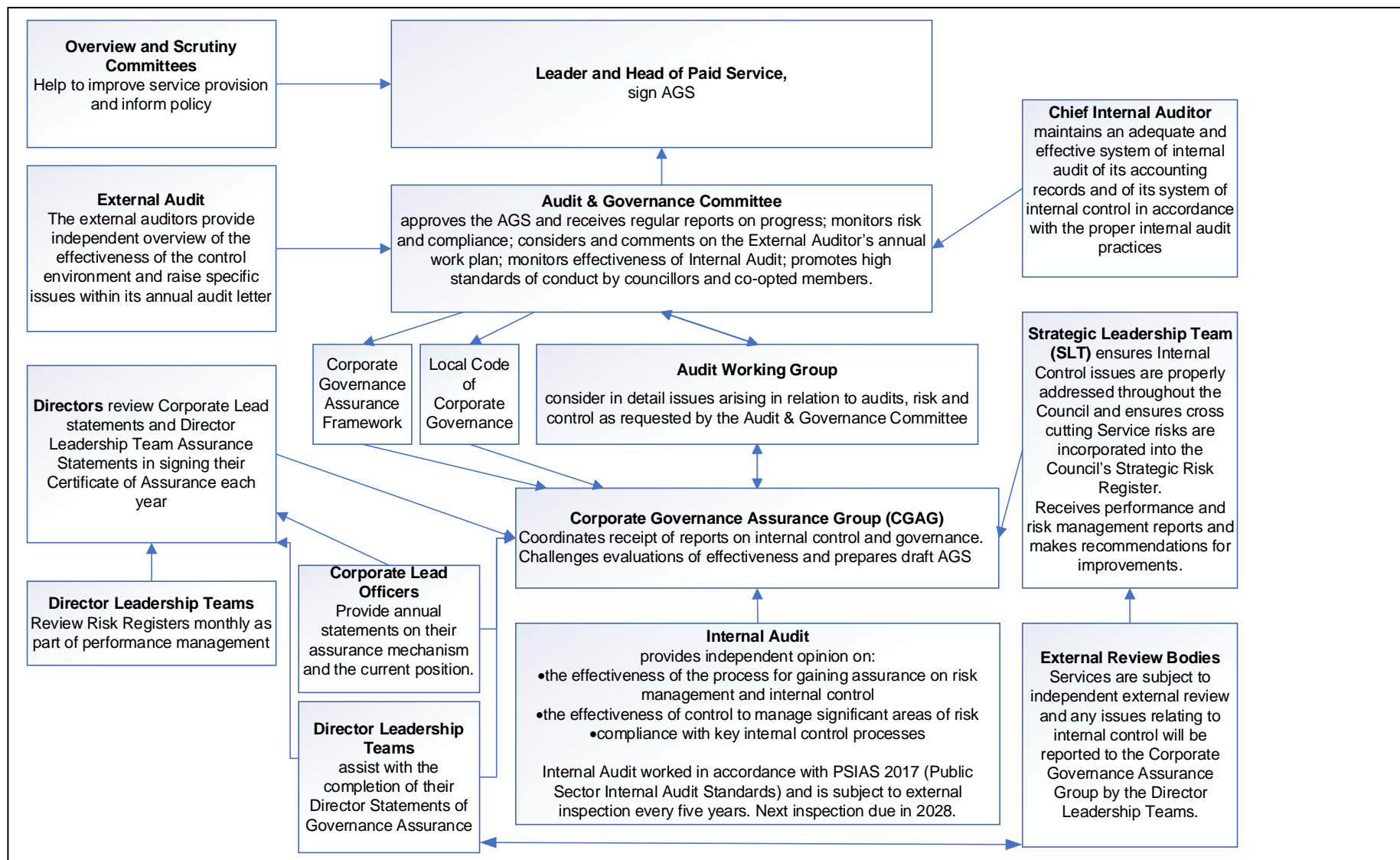
Annex 2 - Significant Governance Issues - 2025/26

	<p>A Contract and Supplier Management project has been mobilised with the following five workstreams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Contract Management Framework • Ways of Working • Governance and Oversight • Systems, processes and data • Skills, capability and knowledge 		<p>contracts and commercial relationships by value, risk and opportunity; it will also define the system, processes and reporting to provide the oversight of the performance of our contracts and the effectiveness of contract management in achieving best value.</p> <p>Contract management training will be in place to ensure that our contract management have the skills and knowledge needed to manage contracts effectively, proportionate to value and risk.</p>	Services
4.	<p>Executive Officer Decisions</p> <p>To provide guidance to officers on the procedure for making officer executive decisions, in particular the process that applies to key decisions</p>	31 March 2026	<p>Changes to the Constitution have highlighted a need to refresh training and templates on officer decision making. An internal group to develop guidance, manage changes to process and templates and to develop training for officers has been set up. Training will follow in 2025/26.</p>	Head of Legal & Governance
5.	<p>Code of Practice on Good Governance for Local Authority Statutory Officers</p> <p>To undertake a self-assessment against the Code of Practice on Good Governance for Local Authority Statutory Officers.</p>	31 March 2026	<p>In July 2024 Lawyers in Local Government (LLG), CIPFA and SOLACE launched a new Code of Practice on Good Governance for Local Authority Statutory Officers.</p> <p>The council should ensure it is meeting the expectations set out in The Code of Practice for the Chief Executive, Chief Financial Officer, and the Monitoring Officer.</p>	Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
6.	<p>Appointment of Independent Member of the Audit & Governance Committee</p>	31 December 2025	<p>To undertake a recruitment campaign and appoint to this position.</p>	Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer /

Annex 2 - Significant Governance Issues - 2025/26

				Head of Legal & Governance, and Deputy Monitoring Officer
7.	To commission an Independent Remuneration Panel this year to consider member allowances.	31 December 2025	An Independent Remuneration Panel must be commissioned to consider member allowances to set a new scheme of allowances from 1 April 2026.	Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal & Governance, and Deputy Monitoring Officer
8.	Inspections Review: Readiness and Sharing Learning To facilitate opportunities for assurance colleagues to share experiences and learning: Raise awareness through internal communications and cultural change: Leverage technology for data efficiencies:	31 March 2026	To improve collaboration, sharing of inspection insights, and overall inspection readiness within Oxfordshire County Council.	Director of Transformation, Digital and Customer Experience

Annex 3: Overview of Corporate Governance Assurance Framework



Annex 4: Financial Management Code of Practice – Summary Compliance Assessment 2024/25

Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
1.	Responsibilities of the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) and Leadership Team			
A	The leadership team is able to demonstrate that the services provided by the authority provide value for money (VfM)	<p>Working as part of the Council Management Team, the Director for Financial & Commercial Services is responsible for the leading on the delivery of the council's Commercial Strategy which was agreed by Cabinet in March 2024. This seeks to promote a wide and more integrated approach to commercial management combining strategic and operational tasks distributed across the Council.</p> <p>Services use benchmarking to inform opportunities to improve VfM but this has generally been ad hoc and there has been limited visibility beyond the service.</p> <p>Procurement decisions consider VfM by considering the quality of service and not just price.</p>	<p>The Commercial Strategy is being delivered through a Commercial Transformation Programme overseen by the Commercial Board operating under the direction of the Council Management Team.</p> <p>Risk appetite, people, capability and processes, and monitoring and evaluation are being considered and developed through the implementation of the strategy.</p> <p>More systematic business intelligence information and insight needed to underpin the Commercial Strategy and enable the council to demonstrate that all revenue and capital expenditure provides VfM is being developed by November 2025 as part of the council's Business Services Transformation programme.</p>	AMBER

B	<p>The authority complies with the CIPFA “Statement of the Role of the CFO in Local Government”</p>	<p>The CFO is qualified accountant with significant experience working as an active member of the council’s leadership team.</p> <p>In carrying out their role as Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, the CFO is a member of SLT (Strategic Leadership Team) and reports directly to the Chief Executive. The CFO has an influential role with members of the Cabinet, Audit & Governance Committee and lead opposition members.</p> <p>Funding for additional finance capacity needed to support the organisation to transform and to ensure that the CFO is able to lead and direct a finance function that is resourced to be fit for purpose was agreed as part of the 2024/25 budget.</p> <p>Reflecting the need to ensure financial literacy across the council new job roles agreed as part the organisational redesign of the council’s senior management structure in 2024 clearly set out the financial management responsibilities of each of the council’s directors and their direct reports. These responsibilities will be followed up through on-going performance management in 2025/26.</p> <p>Following the corporate Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) review (a review of the IBC partnership with Hampshire County Council) a number of finance improvements were identified and have been put into the Business Services Transformation programme of work, covering Finance, HR and Purchasing</p>	<p>The Business Services Transformation programme is reviewing financial management, procure-to-pay and HR activities performed across the council. The programme is currently being reviewed and reset and will be delivering through into 2025/26.</p>	<p>GREEN</p>
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Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
2.	Governance and Financial Management Style			
C	<p>The Leadership Team demonstrates in its actions and behaviours responsibility for governance and internal control</p>	<p>The Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) understands its responsibilities in relation to Financial Management and considers the assessment against the Code and actions or further work required in order to continuously improve.</p> <p>The Council Management Team (CMT) receive and review on a quarterly basis a report from the Chief Internal Auditor on progress against the Internal Audit Plan, implementation of agreed management actions and delivery of the Counter Fraud Plan. The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) and Action Plan are also considered by CMT.</p> <p>In addition, the Audit & Governance Committee have a key role in providing independent assurance over governance, risk and internal control arrangements.</p> <p>SLT are continuing to discharge their responsibilities through CMT. Ongoing focus on managing pressures over the short and medium term to maintain financial resilience is evidenced in the reduction in the level of forecast overspend in 2024/25.</p> <p>Work has been undertaken during 2024/25 to establish a meaningful and effective approach to updating and maintaining schemes of financial delegation across services.</p>		GREEN

Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
D	The authority applies the CIPFA/SOLACE “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2016)”	The Local Code of Corporate Governance sets out how the Council complies with the requirements of the Framework and identifies key documents, which provide detailed information as to how the Council ensures the Corporate Governance principles are adhered to. The annual update of the Oxfordshire Code of Corporate Governance was last approved by Audit & Governance Committee in March 2024 .		GREEN

E	<p>The Financial Management style of the authority supports financial sustainability</p>	<p>The Council has adopted a Business Partnering model that supports managers to deliver financially sustainable services by providing strategic advice and support. Training in financial management roles and responsibilities has been a focus across a number of Directorates during the last financial year.</p> <p>This is underpinned by a Corporate Function that manages the strategic financing issues and provides the budget setting and accounting framework for the organisation.</p> <p>An updated Financial Strategy including financial performance indicators that are tracked and reporting during the following year is published annually as part of the budget agreed by Council.</p> <p>The council's Commercial Strategy will promote a wide and more integrated approach to commercial management combining strategic and operational tasks distributed across the Council.</p> <p>A council-wide Project Portfolio Management (PPM) system, which will enable improved oversight of capital schemes, has been implemented in 2024/25 and the expectation is that the outputs from this system will be used to inform capital programme boards and the Strategic Capital Board. along with</p>	<p>A new Financial Management Strategy is being developed as part of Business Services Transformation. The Strategy will set out the improvements required to enhance financial management capabilities including financial management reporting structures and the development of business objects dashboard reporting.</p> <p>An improvement plan which will include enhancements and opportunities using technology and data for enabling more efficient and effective financial management across the council will be agreed as part of the Strategy.</p> <p>Following the changes to the senior management structure and organisational redesign business partnering will be developed across more functions within the council with operating models agreed to reflect the on-going arrangements.</p> <p>Longer-term financial planning is not possible while the</p>	<p>AMBER</p>
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Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
			Government's approach to local government funding is unclear. This is being kept under constant review as more information becomes available from Government.	
3. Long to Medium-Term Financial Management				
F	The authority has carried out a credible and transparent financial resilience assessment	<p>A review of the 2023/24 CIPFA Financial Resilience index has been undertaken, and the assessment will be included in the Financial Strategy (section 4.5 of the Budget & Business Planning Report to Cabinet in January 2025).</p> <p>The Financial Strategy also includes a suite of performance indicators against which financial performance is measured during the year and reported through the Business Management & Monitoring Reports to Cabinet. These measures include the forecast level of General Balances against the minimum risk assessed level for balances taking into account the latest monitoring position in the current year and the forecast achievement of savings built into the budget.</p>		GREEN

Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
G	The authority understands its prospects for financial sustainability in the longer term and has reported this clearly to members	<p>The Financial Strategy and MTFS outline the financial challenges and opportunities facing the Council over the medium term and set out how action is being taken to manage expenditure within the available funding.</p> <p>The Capital & Investment Strategy and the Capital Programme both cover a 10-year period. The Capital & Investment Strategy sets out the long-term context in which capital expenditure and investment decisions are made and articulates how the Council's capital investment will help achieve the Council's vision and priorities as well as respond to demographic change.</p>	<p>With the development of a new business intelligence approach, and potential longer run opportunities through the move to the Hampshire Partnership's move to SAP 4 HANA from 2026/27 it remains an ambition to improve budget planning information and to progress the development of more accessible scenario planning in relation to long term budget planning and the council's place shaping ambitions. Once SAP 4 HANA is available an assessment will be made of the opportunities arising from this.</p> <p>The development of high level Business Plans for each service will help to align service plans with the Financial Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy.</p>	GREEN

Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
H	The authority complies with the CIPFA "Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities"	<p>The Capital & Investment Strategy is updated annually and agreed by Council alongside the Capital Programme, Treasury Management Strategy, Annual Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy.</p> <p>The Capital Programme is monitored monthly with reports produced quarterly for the Strategic Capital Board and Cabinet. Quarterly Treasury Management reports are taken to Audit & Governance Committee, Cabinet and Council, including monitoring of Prudential Indicators.</p> <p>The ratio of financing costs to the net revenue stream is forecast to remain within at around 5% over the medium term with a recommended limit of 5.5%. The future affordability of any proposed new borrowing is a key consideration within the Budget & Business Planning process.</p>		GREEN

Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
I	The authority has a rolling multi-year medium-term financial plan consistent with sustainable service plans	The Council has an integrated Business and Budget Planning Process with a multi-year Medium Term Financial Strategy linked to service plans. This is reviewed and updated each year with new future years added to ensure that the strategy covers at least three years.	High level Business Plans for each service area are being developed by each director and are expected to be used to inform and underpin the budget and business planning process from 2026/27 onwards.	GREEN
4. The Annual Budget				
J	The authority complies with its statutory obligations in respect of the budget setting process	The Council produces an annual balanced budget and supporting documentation within the necessary timeframe.		GREEN

Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
K	The budget report includes a statement by the CFO on the robustness of the estimates and a statement on the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves	The CFO's Section 25 report accompanies the suite of Budget documents and includes a commentary on the adequacy of proposed financial reserves with reference to CIPFA's Resilience Index as well as assessed compliance with the FM Code.		GREEN
5.	Stakeholder Engagement and Business Plans			

Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
L	The authority has engaged where appropriate with key stakeholders in developing its long-term financial strategy, medium-term financial plan and annual budget	<p>The council's approach to consultation and engagement is set out in the consultation and engagement Strategy 2022/25. This puts residents at the heart of decision-making and aims to engage with and listen to residents and other partners in a more active and inclusive way.</p> <p>As part of the budget process for 2024/25 the council used an online budget simulator tool for the first time. The aim was to help people to learn more about the services the council provides and have their say on savings and spending, by setting their own balanced budget for the council.</p> <p>Consultation and engagement to support budget and business planning for 2025/26 has been organised into three phases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase 1: Representative residents' survey • Phase 2: Participatory engagement: Budget simulator and sounding boards for children and young people • Phase 3: Public consultation on the substance of the 2025/26 budget. <p>The outputs from Phase 1 and 2 were shared in the Budget & Business Planning report to Cabinet in October 2024 so they were available to inform the proposals shared later in the process. Performance & Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee have also considered the budget proposals ahead of the budget being agreed by Council.</p>		GREEN

M	<p>The authority uses an appropriate documented options appraisal methodology to demonstrate the value for money of its decisions</p>	<p>Key decisions requiring investment to deliver service improvements, deliver savings or invest or save opportunities require business case to aid decision making via the appropriate governance process (e.g., Strategic Capital Board).</p>	<p>More systematic business intelligence information and insight needed to underpin the Commercial Strategy and enable the council to demonstrate that all revenue and capital expenditure provides VfM is being developed as part of the council's Business Services Transformation programme.</p> <p>The requirements, system, standards and guidance for the development and approval of business cases is being considered as part of the implementation of the Commercial Strategy.</p> <p>The Commercial Transformation Programme includes a workstream which is developing a digitised business case process that will include options appraisal with a delivery date of June 2025.</p>	GREEN
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Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
6.	Monitoring Financial Performance			
N	The Leadership Team takes action using reports enabling it to identify and correct emerging risks to its budget strategy and financial sustainability	<p>The regular Business Management and Monitoring Reports to Cabinet include performance, finance and risk so enable the council's leadership team and Cabinet to respond to emerging issues and to take action to manage those.</p> <p>The regular Capital Programme monitoring report includes updates on scheme activity, performance and risks.</p>	<p>A programme of work is underway to develop a data warehouse covering finance, purchasing and HR. This will improve reporting and support data driven intelligence and decision-making.</p> <p>Development work is underway in 2024 and will continue into 2025/26, with a data extraction project being delivered in partnership with IBC.</p> <p>Stages 1-4 will be completed by March 2025 and stage 5 is scheduled for delivery by end of the year 2025 and will continue into 2025/26.</p> <p>Capital Monitoring will be developed further using outputs from the Project Portfolio Management (PPM) system.</p>	GREEN

Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
O	The Leadership Team monitors the elements of its balance sheet that pose a significant risk to financial sustainability	The Business Management and Monitoring Reports to Cabinet include monitoring of key balance sheet items including balances, reserves, debtors, and cash (including the performance of Treasury Management).		GREEN
7. External Financial Reporting				
P	The CFO has personal and statutory responsibility for ensuring that the statement of accounts produced by the local authority complies with the reporting requirements of the “Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom” (The Code)	<p>The annual accounts are produced in compliance with The Code and always received an unqualified audit opinion up to 2020/21. The audit of the statement of accounts for 2021/22 was delayed by national issues affecting the valuation of infrastructure assets. The external audit report setting out an unqualified opinion was issued on 25 January 2024.</p> <p>The statement of accounts for 2022/23 was published on 23 January 2024 following the resolution of the issues with the valuation of infrastructure assets. As a result of the delay, together with the wider requirements of the local audit reset the council’s external auditors were not able to complete the detailed audit procedures that would be needed to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to issue an unmodified audit report. Therefore, the council has received a disclaimed opinion on the 2022/23 financial statements.</p> <p>The 2023/24 accounts were published on 28 June 2024 and the audit opinion is expected to be received in early 2025. Since it was not possible to have assurance over the brought forward balances from 2022/23 these accounts are also expected to be disclaimed.</p>		GREEN

Annex 4: Financial Management Code of Practice – Summary Compliance Assessment 2024/25

Ref	CIPFA Financial Management Standards	Current Status	Further Work	RAG Status
Q	The presentation of the final outturn figures and variations from budget allows the leadership team to make strategic financial decisions	The Council Management Team and Cabinet consider the outturn and year end variances in a Provisional Outturn Report to Cabinet each June. Where relevant this enables strategic financial decisions to be made early in the following financial year.		GREEN