

Annual Governance Statement  
31<sup>st</sup> March 2025

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2024/25 provides a comprehensive overview of the Council's governance framework, its effectiveness, and the actions taken to address key challenges. The Council in this period has experienced several challenges and has taken significant steps to strengthen governance arrangements following the recommendation received in December 2024 from our external auditors Forvis Mazars.
- 1.2 This work was carried out in the last quarter of this year. An improvement plan and work carried out by the Council in Quarter Four is set out in this statement. The AGS outlines the Council's commitment to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in governance practices and sets out further improvement activity for 2025/26. The Council recognises the challenges and is committed to delivering improvement in accordance with the plan.
- 1.3 The governance arrangements as described above have been applied throughout the year, and up to the date of the approval of the Annual Accounts, providing a framework for identifying governance issues and taking mitigating action. Over the coming year, the Council will continue to operate its governance framework as set out in the Annual Statement and implement the actions identified in the review of effectiveness to further strengthen its governance arrangements in accordance with the action plan set out in this statement. The Council remains committed to delivering high standards of governance and ensuring that its systems and processes support the achievement of strategic objectives and the delivery of quality services to residents.

## **2. Scope of Responsibility**

- 2.1 Governance is about how the Council ensures it is doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner.
- 2.2 The Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is properly accounted for, and provides value for money. The Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 2.3 The Council operates in a complex and constantly evolving financial, policy and legislative environment. The borough continues to progress the delivery of its ambitious Let's Do It Strategy, with staff, residents and stakeholders across the borough engaged in working towards the realisation of the vision. The Council's Corporate Plan sets out its priority actions for delivering the strategy for the borough.
- 2.4 Bury Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in

accordance with the law and proper standards. It is also responsible for ensuring 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 make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way its functions are exercised.

- 2.5 In discharging these responsibilities, the Council must put in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs and effective exercise of its functions, which includes arrangements for the management of risk. The Council has adopted a Code of Corporate Governance which is consistent with the seven principles of the CIPFA /SOLACE framework “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government”.
- 2.6 The Council Constitution document sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent, and accountable to local people. Some of these processes are required by law, while others are a matter for the Council to choose.
- 2.7 The following link takes you to the Bury Council Constitution.
- <https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=350&MId=3768&Ver=4&Info=1>
- 2.8 The Council’s Constitution is reviewed annually to ensure it remains consistent with the principles of the CIPFA code and SOLACE guidance. An update to the Framework was issued in 2016, which has informed the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) from 2016/17 onwards.
- 2.9 This Annual Governance Statement explains how the Council operates its governance framework. The AGS also meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 regulation 6(1) which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an Annual Governance Statement (AGS).
- 2.10 The Council’s financial management arrangements are consistent with a number of the governance requirements of the CIPFA statement on the role of the Chief Finance Officer in Local Government (2016). The Statement requires that the Chief Finance Officer should report directly to the Chief Executive and be a member of the leadership team, with a status at least equivalent to others. For 2024/5 the Council appointed a S151 Officer to be dedicated to Council finance matters (prior appointment was a joint appointment with the NHS).
- 2.11 The Chief Executive is also the place-based lead for the NHS GM services in Bury. She is a Member of the Combined Authorities wider leadership team and holds portfolios within the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and is currently the GM portfolio lead for Equalities Inclusion and Cohesion. The Executive Team sit on GM groups and Executive Directors are members of GM groups including Directors of Childrens Services, Director of Place. The statutory officers attend Treasurers and Chief Legal Officer meetings. The Executive Director (Health and Care) and the Deputy Place based lead for Bury

working in a joint role to oversee health and care services in the community

2.12 All statutory officers have access to the Chief Executive. The Council considers that its management arrangements are appropriate in the context of compliance with the CIPFA Statement.

### **3. The Purpose of the Governance Framework**

3.1 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture, and values by which the Council is directed and controlled, and through which it is accountable to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of the borough's strategic objectives as set out in the Let's Do It strategy – to 2030, and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

3.2 The system of internal control is a significant part of the framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve the Council's aims and objectives and can therefore not provide absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control identifies and prioritises risks; evaluates the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised; and aims to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

### **4. The Governance Framework**

4.1 Corporate governance describes how organisations direct and control what they do. The Constitution is updated when appropriate, to ensure it reflects the Council's current governance arrangements.

4.2 The information below includes key examples of how the Council has adhered to its governance commitments set out in the Code and includes hyperlinks to sources of further information, which include more detail about how the Council has implemented its commitments. The Council has a broad range of strategies and policies in place, and therefore this is not intended to be an exhaustive list. More detail about particular areas of interest can be found on the Council's website <https://www.bury.gov.uk>.

4.3 There are seven core principles of good governance in the public sector, which are set out below (principles 'A' through to 'G'). Each core governance principle has a set of sub-principles beneath it with a description of how we meet those principles. Where applicable, hyperlinks are also provided where you can access more information about key examples of governance in action.

<b>Principle A - Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment</b>	<p>The Council's 'Let's Do It' strategy sets out the vision for Bury 2030. <i>Let's</i> is an acronym for a framework of core operating principles which is intended to drive a common mindset across all partners in Bury to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Operate <b>Locally</b> through a neighbourhood model which means truly understanding and</li></ul>
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<p><b>to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.</b></p>	<p>engaging with local communities;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drive <b>Enterprise</b>;</li> <li>• Work <b>Together</b> with inclusion at our core; and</li> <li>• Take a <b>Strengths</b>-based approach.</li> </ul> <p>Bury's goal is to achieve faster economic growth than the national average, with lower than national average levels of deprivation. Bury's goals include achieving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A better future for the children of the borough</li> <li>• A chance to feel more part of the borough</li> <li>• More green spaces and environmentally friendly and</li> <li>• A better quality of life.</li> </ul> <p>To support these ambitions the Council has focused on embedding its values and behaviors across the workforce this year, including through an immersive learning experience, the Let's Do It Challenge, which has now been attended by over 1,400 staff and a mandatory management development programme which has had over 300 attendees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Local:</b> I'm proud to make a difference to people and communities in the neighbourhoods where they live.</li> <li>• <b>Enterprise:</b> I strive to develop and improve; to play my part in delivering great solutions with the people of Bury.</li> <li>• <b>Together:</b> My work is shaped in an inclusive way, with dignity, kindness and respect; developed together by those with lived experience.</li> <li>• <b>Strengths:</b> I'm proud to build on the strengths of Bury people, my colleagues and myself to deliver.</li> </ul> <p>These behaviours represent how we should do things, how we should treat others, what we should say, and how we should say it.</p> <p>The Council expects all employees and Members to work within and abide by the Code of Conduct for Officers and the Code of Conduct for Members. This code of conduct has been reviewed and considered by standards and Council; an updated code was agreed by Council in March 2024.</p> <p>These codes can be found in the Bury Constitution.  <a href="https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=350&amp;MId=3768&amp;Ver=4&amp;Info=1">https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=350&amp;MId=3768&amp;Ver=4&amp;Info=1</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code of Conduct for employees. <a href="#">Final Section 2 - EE Code of Conduct.pdf</a></li> <li>• The council has a Code of Conduct for Members alongside</li> </ul>
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	<p>supporting guidance for Members <a href="#">SECTION 1- The Code of Conduct.pdf</a></p> <p><a href="#">4. Supporting guidance on Code of Conduct.pdf</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council has an Officer Member protocol <a href="#">PROTOCOL FOR MEMBER AND OFFICER RELATIONS.pdf</a></li> <li>• Members’ training programme – This is updated annually and reviewed by the Member Development Group consisting of Members and Officers.</li> <li>• There is a system for Member and Officer declarations of interest.</li> </ul> <p>We ensure that staff know how to access our whistleblowing procedure <a href="#">Bury Council Whistle Blowing Policy - July 2023</a> We seek to establish, monitor, and maintain the organisation’s ethical standards and performance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigation of complaints about elected members in consultation with the Independent Persons whom the Council is required to appoint under the Localism Act 2011. We have a standards Committee and separate Codes of Conduct for members and officers.</li> <li>• A report is submitted to Annual Council each year regarding the Council Constitution. The report is prepared by the Monitoring Officer and details the work of the Standards Committee and any other governance changes. <a href="https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/documents/s35565/Constitution%20report.pdf">https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/documents/s35565/Constitution%20report.pdf</a></li> <li>• We maintain registers of gifts &amp; hospitality and member &amp; officer interests, with reminders being issued on a regular basis.</li> <li>• Operate ethical procurement policies to ensure that commitment to our values and integrity is delivered by external suppliers delivering services on our behalf.</li> </ul> <p>We have anti-fraud and corruption procedures. All our staff are expected to help prevent fraud and corruption, and are encouraged, supported, and protected to speak up if they encounter potential wrongdoing. <a href="https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/documents/s40038/BuryAntiFraudCorruptionStrategyJuly2023.pdf">https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/documents/s40038/BuryAntiFraudCorruptionStrategyJuly2023.pdf</a></p>
<p><b>Principle B - Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement</b></p>	<p><b>Ensuring Openness</b></p> <p>All Council and Committee meetings are held in public (other than in limited circumstances where consideration of confidential or exempt information means that the public are excluded), with agenda and reports available on the Council’s website. Live-streamed webcasts of Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny, Planning and Licensing committee meetings are available</p>

online, as well as in an archive which can be accessed on-demand. <https://councilstream.com/burycouncil>

The Council publishes a forward plan, notices of key decisions to notify the public of the most significant decisions it is due to take. This is available online.

The Council also publishes its:

- Pay Policy Statement to support the Annual Budget
- Constitution
- Council Cabinet and Committee Reports
- Information on payments over £500
- Information on senior structure and senior roles.

### **Engaging Comprehensively with Institutional Stakeholders**

The Council has led the development of a ten-year vision for the borough which engages partners across the borough in delivery – Team Bury. The Strategy defines the vision; outcome measures and delivery plan to achieve a challenging vision for the borough – to achieve faster economic growth than the national average, with lower than national average levels of deprivation. To direct the Council's contribution to this strategy a Corporate Plan has been produced, and quarterly monitoring reports are produced for the Council's Cabinet.

The Council leads wider stakeholder and community involvement in the Borough strategy through:

- The Team Bury Leadership Group, chaired by the Leader of the Council, engages Chairs / Non-Executives leaders of key Bury Partnership organisation's in long term strategy, ideas and innovations.
- The Team Bury network of the Bury system at Chief Executive level, which aims to represent the wider partners in delivery of the strategy and the work of the Council.
- Engagement of health and care system leaders through the Bury Locality Board, which has a focus on the effective operation of the health and care system in Bury, and the Health and Wellbeing Board which has a clear remit around tackling health inequalities.

In addition to the above, the Council is a constituent District of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) which exercises several new powers devolved from the Central Government. The GMCA meetings are also held in the public domain and streamed live. The Leader of Bury Council is a

constituent member of the GMCA.

Members sit on GMCA committees representing Bury including Waste & Recycling, Audit, Bee Network, GM Skills, scrutiny committee represented by the leader of the Conservative Party, The leader co-chairs the Bee Network committee with the GM Mayor.

There is regular contact with the other nine constituent districts through the meetings of the GMCA. Lead Members and Officers feedback issues to the constituent districts on pertinent matters. Separately the Statutory Regulatory Officers for Finance and Monitoring Officer of each of the districts meet regularly to consider matters of common interest and agree a common approach on shared issues including companies where the Authorities are key shareholders.

The Council has continued to build on its approach to engagement with staff this year through all-staff 'pulse surveys' which have provided an opportunity for all employees to provide feedback which has, in turn, supported the development and progression of the Council's Organisational Development priorities. The organisation's internal communications approach has also continued with a clear monthly rhythm of communications in place including emails, staff briefings, poster distribution to major staff sites and standard computer desktop backgrounds and email signatures. This has been further enhanced on 2024/25 with more in-person engagement opportunities for staff within and across Departments.

The Chief Executive and Senior Leaders have met with services and spent time with staff in Departments to discuss hot topics, Council strategy and discuss service delivery with staff.

All services hold service sessions and communicate with staff in a wide variety of ways from weekly, monthly meetings, newsletters and away days.

### **Engaging with Individual Citizens and Service Users Effectively**

To ensure its message is effectively communicated to its citizens the Council's Communications function proactively prepares appropriate press releases to support activities undertaken by the Council and keep residents informed. The Council's website has been updated throughout the year; The Council use their social media platform to share key messages with residents.

- <https://x.com/BuryCouncil/status/1402245388317433863>
- <https://www.facebook.com/BuryCouncil/>

- <https://www.instagram.com/burycouncil/?hl=en>We ensure that the Council website and buildings are accessible to the public. We publish details of our committees, dates of meetings, and publication of reports in advance of meetings.

We operate the following scrutiny committees:

- Overview and scrutiny
- Children and Young Persons Scrutiny
- Health Scrutiny
- The public participation guidance sets out how the public can engage with our meetings, and participate in matters with the Council – [Final Public Participation Guidance.pdf](#)
- We live stream our Cabinet and Council meetings [Bury Council - Council Stream](#)
- The Council ensures compliance with the requirements of the Transparency code.
- The Council web site is accessible, providing details of Council meetings, its policies procedures and the Council constitution.
- All budget papers are accessible online including our Medium term financial strategy .
- We publish an Annual Statement of Accounts and Annual Auditors report to inform stakeholders and service users of the previous years outcomes.
- Our Standards and Audit Committees both contain Independent Members.
- We have a publication scheme - [Freedom of Information publication scheme - Bury Council](#)
- Our forward plan sets out the details of the key decisions which the Executive Cabinet, individual Executive Members or Officers expect to take during the next four-month period. The Plan is rolled forward every month and is available to the public 14 days before the beginning of each month.
- We publish our forward plan. [Forward plan - Notice of Key Decisions - published January 2025 - Bury Council](#)
- A key decision is a decision taken at a Cabinet meeting, by an individual Cabinet Member, or a Joint Committee of the Cabinet and is:

Any decision in relation to an executive function which results in the council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the council's budget for the service or function concerned. A decision will be considered financially significant if it results in incurring expenditure or making savings of £500,000 or greater; unless the specific expenditure or savings have previously been agreed by full Council.

	<p>Any other executive decision which in the opinion of the Monitoring Officer is likely to be significant having regard to:</p> <p>(a) the number of residents/service users that will be affected in the Wards concerned;</p> <p>(b) whether the impact is short term, long term or permanent.</p> <p>(c) the impact on the community in terms of the economic, social and environmental well-being.</p> <p><b>Maintain and develop relationships with Organisations across the public and voluntary sector</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will consult at an appropriate time with our stakeholders; we will seek the views of Residents when we bring forward specific proposals requiring consultation. We will review and evaluate all responses we receive.</li> <li>• Bury VCFA is a local infrastructure organisation providing Volunteering and Development support to the VCSE sector in Bury, enhancing their ability to support local communities. Bury VCFA also promotes the VCSE sector and advocates on their behalf at a strategic level with other stakeholder.</li> <li>• The Council further supports the VCFA by providing funding for micro and small voluntary community or social enterprise.</li> <li>• Ensuring effective relationships with our joint venture partners and company arrangements with oversight of the Commercial Board.</li> <li>• The Council has established a joint venture partnership with two large, national developers to deliver regeneration at scale in both Prestwich and Bury Town Centres.</li> </ul> <p><b>Co production</b></p> <p>Bury is committed to co production with our communities to ensure that its services are developed with input from the people who use them. This approach has been used across a number of areas including childrens services, adult services and homelessness prevention. The co production outputs create policies help shape our services and improve outcomes ensuring the voice of our residents is heard.</p> <p>Examples of co production include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of the Children and Younger person plan – Young people helping to shape policy development and participation in strategic planning groups</li> <li>• Special Education Needs and Disability support – People centred planning our parents, carers and children are involved in planning and reviewing support</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with partner groups such as Bury2gether is fundamental to our approach, and strengthens our work on the SEND improvement programme</li> <li>• Adult social care – The council commits to peer support review of services</li> <li>• Homelessness – People with lived experience of homelessness help shape our prevention strategy and future response</li> </ul>
<p><b>Principle C - Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits</b></p>	<p><b>Defining Outcomes</b></p> <p>The Let’s Do It Strategy and associated Corporate Plan sets out the immediate and long-term vision for Bury and the work of the Council and its partners. This planning framework seeks to drive and continually measure progress against seven overarching outcomes for the borough, which are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improved quality of life.</li> <li>2. Improved early years development.</li> <li>3. Improved educational attainment.</li> <li>4. Increased adult skill levels and employability.</li> <li>5. Inclusive economic growth.</li> <li>6. Carbon neutrality by 2038.</li> <li>7. Improved digital connectivity</li> </ol> <p>The 2024/25 budget supported this strategy. We will continue to help deliver these priorities through new ways of working.</p> <p><b>Sustainable Economic, Social and Environmental Benefits</b>  Bury Council declared a Climate emergency in 2019 and set a target to be carbon neutral by 2038. The Council developed and adopted a Climate Action Strategy in 2021 and an Action Plan which was updated in March 2024. The Climate Action Board receives quarterly progress updates facilitating partnership working with all sectors.  <a href="https://www.bury.gov.uk/pests-pollution-and-food-hygiene/pollution/lets-go-green-carbon-neutral-bury/burys-climate-action-strategy-and-action-plan">https://www.bury.gov.uk/pests-pollution-and-food-hygiene/pollution/lets-go-green-carbon-neutral-bury/burys-climate-action-strategy-and-action-plan</a></p> <p>The Council is currently preparing a new Local Plan that will guide future development in the borough. Together with the Places for Everyone (PfE) joint development plan, the Local Plan will form a key part of Bury’s overall development plan, and once adopted, this will be the basis for determining future proposals for the next 20 years. The PfE deals with strategic planning matters that are of significance across the Joint Plan area (such as identifying future levels of housing and employment growth), Bury’s Local Plan will contain a range of locally-specific planning policies and identify local sites where development should be</p>

built as well as areas where development should be restricted or controlled. The PfE joint development plan was approved in March 2024.

A procurement strategy has been established which sets out our approach to procurement activity. Procurement will support economic development, supply chain resilience, and help deliver real outcomes to the people of Bury through social value. Bury Council will embrace Social Value to ensure that all the businesses we contract with are supporting our local communities and adding value beyond their contractual requirement. Bury Council will also ensure that we champion Social Value in all that we do. Bury Council is committed to Social Value and supports the Greater Manchester Social Value Framework and Driving Social Value in GM Public Procurement paper.

- We will engage and consult with residents, partners and other key stakeholders when designing key strategies.
- The Let's Do It Strategy sets out a clear ambition for Bury 2030: to stand out as a place that is achieving faster economic growth than the national average, with lower than national average levels of deprivation. Bury Council play a significant role in driving the delivery of this ambition. Let's Do It was codesigned with a wide range of stakeholders and partners, including the Bury business community who have a critical role to play here in supporting the delivery of this ambition as partners across our borough.
- [Let's Do It! strategy - Bury Council](#)
- Our Let's outcomes are tracked and each year a state of the borough report is considered for approval by Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee it is presented to Team Bury. This drives the Team Bury work plan alongside our quarterly performance updates on our strategic plan.
- Ensure that outcomes are focused on achieving delivery of the overall vision for the and to be transparent about financial limitations.
- Develop a Medium-Term Financial Strategy which sets out financial assumptions and provides a set of goals for financial decision making for the planning period ahead.
- Delivery of our social value strategy, climate change policies and providing leadership on our equality, diversity, and inclusion priorities.
- Our Social Value Strategy will be driven by a Steering Group bringing together representatives from all Council Departments, the Bury VCFA and business community. The Steering Group is responsible for assuring delivery and recommend an annual set of TOMS that aligns with our corporate strategy.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Cabinet will also receive an annual report on social value activity and achievements (economic, social, and environmental benefits) in all of its commissioning/procurement, and this is mandated within Contractual Standing Orders.</li> <li>• Ensure our strategic partners share our important Corporate Parenting mission by working closely with large Private Sector organisations with which we have Strategic Partnerships and Joint Ventures to ensure our Looked After Children and Care Experienced young people receive direct benefits from large scale activities occurring within the borough.</li> <li>• Ensure that services are clear about their role in meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty (S149 of the Equality Act 2010). When required, Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out to assess the impact of proposals which may have a differential effect on individuals with protected characteristics and communities across the borough, these reports will be appended to our Cabinet reports.</li> <li>• Commit to progressing EDI for our workforce, informed by our Employee Groups and the Trade Union</li> </ul>
<p><b>Principle D - Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes</b></p>	<p><b>D1 - Determining Interventions</b></p> <p>The Constitution defines and documents the roles and responsibilities of Officers and Members and delegation arrangements, protocols for decision making and codes of conduct for Members and staff. The underpinning Scheme of Delegation is subject to appropriate updates. Further specific delegations may be granted, through recommendations in public reports to Committees.</p> <p>All decisions are formally recorded. In addition, decisions taken under delegated powers are also recorded electronically and are reported via the Council's Electronic Decision Recording System. The Council has a number of meetings which are streamed live, this includes Council and Cabinet.</p> <p><b>D2 - Planning Interventions</b></p> <p>The Council plans its activity at a strategic level through its budget and business planning cycle and does so in consultation with internal and external stakeholders to ensure services delivered across various parts of the organisation and partners complement each other and avoid duplication. The plan is reviewed, and this is report to Cabinet, please see attached links.</p> <p><a href="#">Corporate Plan 2024-25 V2.pdf</a>  <a href="#">Cabinet Report - Corporate Plan Performance Report Q1 V2.pdf</a></p>

	<p>All Executive Directors prepare a service plan which demonstrates how they will deliver their responsibilities within the Corporate Plan, as well as business as usual activity. Plans were included in the Corporate Plan which was presented to Full Council with the budget for the year. The plans were agreed by Council in February 2024. This, in turn, informs Departmental plans and, individual objectives through the Employee Review process.</p> <p><b>D3 - Optimising Achievement of Intended Outcomes</b></p> <p>The Council integrates and balances service priorities, affordability, and other resource constraints, supporting it to take into account the full cost of operations over the medium and longer term, including both revenue and capital spend budgets. This includes a medium-term financial plan.</p> <p><a href="#">Cabinet report</a>  <a href="#">Agenda item - THE COUNCIL'S REVENUE BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - Bury Council</a></p> <p>The Council has a clear set of Equality Objectives and an Inclusion Strategy which it is continuing to drive. 2023/24 has seen strong focus on workforce inclusion in particular and the commencement of work on a new, four year, set of equality objectives which will be agreed in 2024/25.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure our corporate planning is clearly focused on delivery</li> <li>• Ensure consistent and effective service planning, with each service completing an individual plan. Services will ensure that their priorities and activities set out in their service plan all contribute towards delivery of our Corporate Plan, and that there is also a focus on continuous improvement.</li> <li>• Collectively tackle alongside our partners our plans in the Let's Do it strategy</li> </ul> <p>Plan our activity at a strategic level through our budget and business planning cycle, in consultation with internal and external stakeholders. We work with our external stakeholders through Bury Together to ensure services delivered across different parts of the organisations and partners complement each other and avoid duplication.</p>
<p><b>Principle E - Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership</b></p>	<p><b>Developing the Organisation's Capacity</b></p> <p>As the Council continues to face financial pressures, a series of Departmental reviews and restructures have taken / are taking place. Additionally, transformation projects are taking place to review and streamline processes in place to drive improvement in the services provided, by using new technologies, ways of</p>

<p><b>and the individuals within it</b></p>	<p>working and new delivery models. Training is provided to develop and support staff whose roles may change as restructures take place.</p> <p>The Council has active engagement with the Trade Unions and there are regularly convened Corporate and departmental Joint Consultative Committees to discuss restructures and specific service matters. The Trade Unions also play an active role in consultations with staff and feedback comments to the Council. Staff capacity development is supported through development planning, which is at the core of the Employee Review process. A range of development opportunities are available to all staff, including accredited qualifications supported through the Council's Apprenticeship Strategy which was refreshed this year.</p> <p>There is a specific focus on leadership and management development with a core management development programme in place which has now had circa. 300 participants.</p> <p>A Members Development Group is in place which oversees Member training and development activity. This includes clear expectations in relation to core training as well as specific development for portfolio holders and Committee Chairs. In response to the December 2023 LGA Peer Review a strengthened Member Development offer has been created, which includes a clearer and enhanced core programme of support as well as specific leadership development opportunities for senior Members, provided by the LGA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide an induction programme for all newly elected members.</li> <li>• We provide a members development programme for all Members which is reviewed and updated annually, the programme provides a training programme for the municipal year and specific programmes for Members to develop their Leadership skills. Mandatory Training is provided to Members sitting on Audit, Planning and Licensing Committee. Members are asked to complete core training modules each year including corporate parenting training but also have access to a range of online training.</li> </ul> <p><b>Developing the Capability of the Organisation's Leadership and Other Individuals</b></p> <p>The Council is committed to a program of leadership development and now has a well-established rhythm of meetings and engagement through the Executive Team (Executive Directors), the Strategic Leadership Group (Departmental Management Teams / Assistant Directors and above) and the Senior Managers' Forum, (Heads of Service and other senior</p>
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managers). These groups support personal as well as collective organisational development through building relationships across Departments. As noted above, the Council is also continuing to deliver its core management development programme with circa. 300 managers having now benefited from this.

The Council has many policies and procedures relating to HR and these are available on the Council's intranet site and are easily accessible. We have a staff handbook to ensure consistent and high-quality people management across the Council.

Underpinning this, a comprehensive programme of review is underway across all workforce policies, with 9 policies formally reviewed and agreed this year.

Services are required to have regular team meetings, and one to ones with line managers, and these are in addition to the annual performance setting discussions that inform key priorities and outcomes for the year (the Employee Review). There is an Executive team briefing, and regular weekly staff e-mail communications providing staff broadcasts and wellbeing support. Locally, engagement activity is delivered within Departments and Services aligned to their specific ways of working.

Immediately following local elections, new Council Members receive an induction into the work of the Council and their role as local members. The format and content are reviewed annually with members at the Member Development Group. The induction training is also open for existing members to attend. All Members are provided with training before sitting on any regulatory committee. In addition, the Council provides a mock Council training session for new members and existing Members to attend; the Leaders of the Groups support this training.

The Council is committed to promoting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of the workforce through both specific interventions and opportunities and as a central part of the role of all managers. There is a dedicated intranet page with a wide range of support and guidance for staff and their managers as part of the Council's 'Live Better, Feel Better programme' covering a wide range of health and wellbeing topics across including mental, physical and financial wellbeing underpinned by a 24/7 Employee Assistance Programme (phone line and online support) providing a range of support. During the past year, the Council has launched its new Occupational Health Provider and transitioned to a new Employee Assistance Programme. An all-staff roadshow was also held in the Town Hall so staff could engage with the range of wellbeing and benefits available to them.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All staff Members have an annual personal development review.</li> <li>• Staff are required to complete a suite of mandatory training modules, compliance is reviewed regularly, Managers are provided with a dashboard providing this information.</li> <li>• A full induction is provided to all new starter and all staff moving roles.</li> </ul> <p>There is a programme of briefings to all staff, the Chief Executive has a regular VLOG All staff members have access to our Employee Assistance programme.</p>
<p><b>Principle F - Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management</b></p>	<p><b>F1 – Managing Risk</b></p> <p>The Council operates a risk management framework that aids decision making in pursuit of the organisation’s strategic objectives, protects the Council’s reputation and other assets and is compliant with statutory and regulatory obligations. The Corporate Risk Register is part of this framework and is an articulation of the key risks impacting the Council. It is used to inform decision making, provide assurance over actions being taken to manage key risks and to inform directorate level risk management planning and mitigation activities. Named risk managers are identified in the Register for its key strategic risks. The corporate risk register is presented to, and discussed by, the Executive Team throughout the year, and is regularly presented to the Audit Committee.</p> <p>In addition to this, internal audit report findings on audits are presented to the Audit Committee throughout the year. Other senior officers throughout the organisation report to both the Council’s Cabinet and the Locality Board as well as various Overview and Scrutiny Boards.</p> <p>Reports to Committees also include a section that sets out the risks to any proposals and recommendations. Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken, where required and documented as part of all formal Committee Reports to ensure the Council is acting in accordance with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty.</p> <p>All reports presented to Cabinet are signed off by both the Monitoring Officer and the S151 officer (or nominated individual) to ensure appropriate financial and legal oversight is provided on all recommendations. Legal and financial implications are set out in all reports to ensure that the implications of recommendations are fully understood prior to a decision being made.</p>

## **F2 – Managing Performance**

The Council puts in place Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor service delivery whether services are internal or through external providers. An Integrated Monitoring and Corporate Plan report is provided to the Executive team monthly. This brings together analysis of performance against the Corporate Plan to highlight any challenges so that they can be addressed. The Cabinet receives quarterly reports on our performance against the Corporate Plan.

## **F3 - Effective Overview and Scrutiny**

- **Scrutiny and challenge by Council and its Committees** - The Council has bodies responsible for monitoring and reviewing the Council's governance:
  - 1) **The Cabinet** - Proposes the budget and policy framework to Council and makes decisions on resources and priorities relating to the budget and policy framework
  - 2) **Audit Committee** - Approves the Council's Annual Accounts, oversees External Audit activity and oversees the effectiveness of the Council's Governance, risk management, and internal control arrangements
  - 3) **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** - Considers the implications of financial decisions and changes to corporate, partnership and city region governance arrangements
  - 4) **Health Scrutiny committee** - To review the policies and performance of the Council and external organisations in relation to the following areas:
    - Adult social care (including adult safeguarding Health and wellbeing board)
    - Housing
    - Public health
    - Adults and Communities budget and policy framework
    - Statutory health scrutiny powers including the review and scrutiny of any matter relating to the planning provision and operation of health services for children and young people, including transitional health care services, affecting the area and to make reports and recommendations on these matters
  - 5) **Childrens scrutiny committee** - To review the policies and performance of the Council and

	<p>external organisations in relation to the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education and Schools</li> <li>• Children and Young People Support and Safeguarding Services</li> <li>• Children and Young People Specialist Services</li> <li>• To scrutinise individual Cabinet decisions relating to the above areas.</li> <li>• To monitor the Council's performance in the above areas.</li> <li>• To scrutinise statutory inspection reports and oversee the implementation of any recommendations arising from such reports.</li> <li>• Transitional arrangements between children and adult services</li> <li>• Statutory education scrutiny powers</li> </ul> <p>6) <b>Standards Committee</b> - Promotes high standards of ethical conduct, advising on the revision of the Codes of Corporate Governance and Conduct for Members.</p> <p>The three Scrutiny Committees which hold decision makers to account and play a key role in ensuring that public services are delivered in a way residents want - the agenda, reports and minutes are publicly available on the Council website. All scrutiny committees have a forward plan outlining the matters the Committee will scrutinise. Scrutiny Chairs meet regularly as a group to review their plans.</p> <p>The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a finance and performance subgroup that carries out deep dives into performance and finance matters. The effectiveness of governance arrangements is monitored and evaluated throughout the year.</p> <p><b>F4 – Robust Internal Control</b></p> <p>The Council Annual Corporate Risk Management report, and its Internal Audit Plan set out the view on the internal control environment. The report sets out areas in which the internal control environment required strengthening.</p> <p>Audit plan 2024 - <a href="#">Audit Report</a></p> <p>The Council has an Audit Committee, in line with CIPFA's 'Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police (2018)', which provides an independent and high-level</p>
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resource to support good governance and strong financial management.

The Council maintains clear policies and arrangements in respect of counter fraud and anti-corruption. These are the Anti- Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy; Whistleblowing Policy; Anti Money Laundering Policy and the Anti Bribery Policy. These policies were last refreshed in December 2025 along with the production of an updated strategy.

<https://www.bury.gov.uk/my-neighbourhood/fraud>

### **F5 – Managing Data**

The processing of personal data is essential to many of the services and functions carried out by local authorities. The Council complies with data protection legislation, which includes GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018). This will ensure that such processing is carried out fairly, lawfully, and transparently. <https://www.bury.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/data-protection/data-protection-legislation>

The Council reviews and supplements its policies, and keep its processing activities under review, to ensure they remain consistent with the law, and any compliance advice and codes of practice issued from time to time by the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO).

The Council ensures that officers handling personal data are trained to an appropriate level in the use and control of personal data. It is made clear that all staff and Members are personally accountable for using the Council’s information responsibly and appropriately. All staff must undertake protecting information e-learning training on an annual basis, and this forms part of the induction process for new staff. Data protection also forms part of the induction program for new Members and is included in the Council’s new starters induction pack.

Information Governance is overseen by the Director of Law and Governance who is the Senior Information Risk Officer for the Council (SIRO). The Council’s performance on managing data is reported to the Audit Committee on a bi-annual basis.

The Council makes information available to the public via the information access regimes provided for by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. Data protection legislation, including the Data Protection Act 2018, provides individuals with various rights. The Council ensures that all valid requests from individuals to

exercise those rights are dealt with as quickly as possible, and by no later than the timescales allowed in the legislation. Information regarding Freedom of Information requests and Environmental Information Regulations can be found online by accessing the following link:

<https://www.bury.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/requesting-information>

- A suite of policies are in place [03 Data Protection Policy September 2024.pdf](#)
- Two Caldicott Guardians are in place for Children and Adults they provide leadership and guidance on complex matters.
- An electronic system is in place for the reporting of data breaches.
- The DPO provides advice on Privacy Impact Assessments and Data Processing agreements.
- The Council maintain a Record of Processing Activity.
- The Council operate of system of Information Governance champions.
- The DPO works with other DPO/Leads across GM and alongside the GMCA team ensuring that good practice is maintained.

## **F6 – Strong Public Financial Management**

The Council's approach to Financial Management ensures that public money is safeguarded at all times, ensuring value for money. Its approach supports both long-term achievement of objectives, and shorter term financial and operational performance.

The Director of Finance (S151 Officer) ensures that appropriate advice is given on all financial matters, proper financial records and accounts are kept and oversees an effective system of internal financial control. The Director of Finance ensures well developed financial management is integrated at all levels of planning and control including management of financial risks, systems, and processes. The Constitution (Part 4 Section 6) details the financial regulations which underpin the financial arrangements.

<https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/documents/s39461/Section%206%20Financial%20Regulations.pdf>

The Financial Management Code (FM Code) sets out the standards of financial management expected for local authorities and is designed to support good practice and to assist local authorities in demonstrating their financial sustainability. The FM Code was launched in 2019, with the first full year of compliance being 2021/22.

Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires that when a local authority is making its budget calculations, the Chief Finance Officer ('CFO') of the authority must report to the Council on the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.

- [Agenda item - The Council's 2025/26 Revenue Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy \(MTFS\) for 2026/27 through to 2027/28 - Bury Council](#)
- Financial management led by the Finance Board, which is Chaired by the s151 Officer Director of Finance.
- Ensure advice is given on all financial matters; proper financial records and accounts are kept and oversees an effective system of internal financial control.
- When making our budget calculations, ensure that the Chief Finance Officer S151 reports to Council on the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations, and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.
- Follow CIPFA's Prudential Code and Treasury Management Code of Practice which set out the risk framework through which the Council manages its balance sheet and makes capital investment decisions.
- Maintain strategies and processes detailing our approach to decision making on capital investments, and treasury management

The Council delivers a range of partnerships which involves working with others, these include:

- Joint venture arrangement for the development of the Millgate Estate; A board is in place attended by the Bury Council Chief Executive, the Council Leader and the Executive Director of Place. Strategic financial advice and legal support is provided by the S151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer. A Council officer is assigned to provide day to day support to the Joint Venture.
- Joint venture arrangement in place for the development of Prestwich Town Centre. A board is in place which is attended by the Bury Council Chief Executive, the Council Leader and the Executive Director of Place. Strategic financial advice and legal support is provided by the S151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer. A Council officer is assigned to provide day to day support to the Joint Venture.

The Council also has relationships with:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bury MBC Townside Fields, a wholly owned subsidiary set up to develop Townside Fields, including Q park, 3KP, Townside Fields, Premier Inn.</li> <li>• Townside Fields Management Company, a company in which Bury MBC owns a third of the shareholding.</li> <li>• Six Town Housing Limited – A wholly owned subsidiary company of the Council and Private Registered Provider of Social Housing owning and leasing 149 social housing homes which it lets and sublets to its own social housing tenants under the assured tenancy regime governed by the Housing Act 1988.</li> <li>• Persona – a Local Authority Trading Company established to provide a range of adult social care services.</li> </ul> <p>It is a requirement of the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting that ‘Where an authority is in a group relationship with other entities and undertakes significant activities through the group, the review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control should include its group activities.’</p> <p>Arrangements are in place for the Council and the group companies to work together in setting priorities and overseeing and reporting on performance. The internal audit service also carries out audits of these organisations as part of the requirement to fulfil statutory S151 duties.</p> <p>CIPFA’s Prudential Code of Practice and Treasury Management Code of Practice sets out the risk framework through which the Council manages its balance sheet and makes capital investment decisions. Alongside the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) guidance on minimum revenue provision, and the guidance on borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLb) which seeks to limit borrowing solely for yield, the Council has a strong regulatory framework that it adheres to. There is a Capital Board which is chaired by the S151 Officer, and the Capital Strategy and capital approval process detail the approach to decision making on capital investments, and the Treasury Management Strategy details the approach for debt management and cash investing, both of which contribute to strong, ongoing financial management of the Council’s balance sheet.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operate an effective risk management framework, ensuring that a system of risk recording is across all areas of the Council to inform the corporate risk register.</li> <li>• Clear performance metrics against the corporate plan are reported to Members on a quarterly basis, under pinned by a system of Boards and Members Assurance Group.</li> <li>• Effective Overview and Scrutiny committees providing a check and balance and critical friend role.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal controls to assist in the management of risks. Response to internal and external audit reports including responding to any recommendations from our Auditors.</li> <li>• Internal control processes, which support the achievement of our objectives while managing risks. The current approach will be set out annually in Risk and Internal Audit reports to Audit Committee and supported by our governance Boards.</li> <li>• Maintain and communicate clear policies and arrangements in respect of counter fraud and anti-corruption.</li> <li>• Maintain an Audit Committee which oversees the effectiveness of governance and risk management arrangements, internal systems of control, and antifraud and anti-corruption arrangements.</li> <li>• Annually report to Audit Committee our internal auditor’s findings into the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the framework of governance, risk management and control.</li> <li>• Ensure robust and integrated risk management arrangements are in place, we have risk registers supported by a risk tool kit. Our corporate risk register is reviewed by our Audit Committee</li> <li>• Maintain financial regulations to ensure consistency and clear financial protocols</li> <li>• Maintain a transparent complaints and feedback procedure.</li> <li>• Internal Audit annual risk-based programme of internal audits informed by the council’s risk register.</li> <li>• Ensure effective information governance arrangements are in place to support compliance with existing and emerging legislation for data protection and privacy.</li> </ul> <p>Regular Finance and performance reporting – quarterly budget monitoring to Members.</p>
<p><b>Principle G - Assurance and Effective Accountability</b></p>	<p><b>Implementing Good Practice in Transparency</b></p> <p>The Council follows the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, which includes requirements and recommendations for local authorities to publish certain types of data.  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-transparency-code-2015">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-transparency-code-2015</a></p> <p>The Council’s website is set out in a clear and easily accessible way, using infographics and plain language. Information on expenditure, performance and decision making is sited together in one place and can be accessed quickly and easily from the homepage. <a href="https://www.bury.gov.uk/">https://www.bury.gov.uk/</a></p> <p><b>G2 – Implementing Good Practices in Reporting</b></p> <p>The Council produces a detailed, annual Corporate Performance Delivery Report, which charts the boroughs progress towards its</p>

vision and priorities. The Executive have oversight of performance, finance and workforce matters, regular finance reports are brought to this meeting.

<https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/documents/s35746/Bury%20Corporate%20Plan%20Performance%20and%20Delivery%20Report%20Quarter%20Four%20End%20of%20Year%202022-23.pdf>

- We follow the Local Government Transparency Code, which includes requirements and recommendations for local authorities to publish certain types of data The council is committed to being open and transparent about its financial affairs.
- Details of all council expenditure over £500 are published on the council's website
- Our pay policy statement is published online as is details of senior officer remuneration
- We publish our contract register which contains details of all contracts for the supply of goods and services to the council that have a value in excess of £5,000.
- Internal audit independently and critically evaluates the council's internal control framework and, where necessary, makes recommendations for improvement and the introduction of best practice.
- The Head of Internal Audit presents an annual report to Audit Committee to provide an opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the council's internal control environment.
- The Audit Committee meet to receive the reports of both Internal and External Audit.

#### **Implementing good practice in reporting**

- We report on finance and performance against our plans on a quarterly basis to Cabinet.
- We ensure that the Executive Leadership team receive reports from our Governance Boards to ensure identified challenges can be addressed.
- We produce an annual State of the borough report

#### **Assurance and effective accountability**

Prior to the introduction of the Boards in January 2025, assurance was obtained through Member and Officer meetings and Senior Executive Leader and with the Strategic Leadership team.

Assurance and accountability in this period was subject to oversight by the Executive team who throughout this period met on a weekly basis.

Committees and council provided the framework for monitoring and reviewing Council governance. Cabinet leading on the budget and policy framework, making decisions on resources and priorities relating to the budget and policy framework. Adult committee providing oversight of the internal control arrangements, governance and risk management. Our scrutiny committees Overview & Scrutiny, Health Committee. Childrens scrutiny committee all met regularly throughout this time. In addition constitutional reviews were provided to Council and standards committee undertook its work programme. Statutory Officers met monthly.

Senior officers across the Council met at wider leadership team meetings, managers were further supported by a management development programme which also ran throughout this timeframe. Although this activity was undertaken the recommendation from our Internal Auditor led the Council to reflect, review and make proposals to strengthen the governance arrangements.

#### **Assurance – Post establishment of the Boards in January 2025**

The improvement plan and report from our internal auditors has led to a revised approach to internal governance.

Six Assurance Boards have been established from January 2025. The Boards report into Executive Leadership Team and Members Assurance Group through a monthly highlight report (which is shared with the Cabinet Members). The Boards are chaired by an Executive Director and attended by Directors and Directorate leads. The assurance boards meet monthly, with clear Terms of Reference, work programmes, a lead Officer and action notes/action tracker. The Assurance Boards are:

- Commercial
- Finance
- Governance and Assurance
- Performance, Delivery and Transformation
- Property and Estates
- Regeneration

Executive Leadership Team meet weekly, chaired by the Chief Executive and with formal action notes and action tracking by the Chief Executives PA. Attendance to include all Executive Directors and statutory officers. The standing agenda will include:

- Delivery of the improvement plan (from January 2025)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate assurance, through a highlight report from each Board on a rotating basis and updates on workforce and budget monitoring</li> <li>• The decision-making forward plan and meeting preparation</li> <li>• The GM interface</li> <li>• Communications messages for dissemination</li> </ul> <p>From January 2025 a weekly Member Assurance Group is held to facilitate private political briefing and challenge on key areas of risk, membership to include, the Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and the Chief Executive. Action notes and action log are to be produced and shared weekly at Executive Leadership Team. Other Officers to attend by invitation – key areas of focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal audit recommendations</li> <li>• Financial transformation</li> <li>• Estates, including the corporate landlord, and estates compliance</li> <li>• Project Safety Valve</li> </ul> <p>Elected Member Oversight will be provided via regular reporting into the Council’s Audit Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. A standardised agenda is used for all Cabinet Portfolio Meetings, which will include internal audit reports and assurance board highlight report.</p> <p>A consistent structure, including a standardised agenda is applied to Departmental Management Teams, which will support the Board structure by providing oversight and assurance of Business-as-Usual activity including workforce and budget management. Standard Agenda to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operational overview and update, including update/feedback to Directors from Executive Leadership Team</li> <li>• Actions/issues from Assurance Boards</li> <li>• Highlight reports from corporate business partners, provided on at least a quarterly basis</li> <li>• Decision making</li> </ul> <p>The Strategic Leaders’ Group of Council Directors meet on a quarterly basis with a specific remit to develop a high-performance culture.</p>
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**5. Annual Review of the Effectiveness of the Governance Framework**

The Council has a legal responsibility to conduct an annual review of the effectiveness of its governance framework, including the systems of internal control. After conducting this review, the Council has assurance that its

governance arrangements and systems of control are not sufficiently robust and require strengthening.

The Council's external Auditors, Forvis Mazars, presented the outcome of their audit work in relation to their judgements in the area of the Council's Value for Money arrangements for the 2021/22 and 2022/23 financial years to the December Audit Committee meeting. They identified three significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements. These weaknesses are across all three reporting criteria that they are required to consider under the Code of Audit Practise, namely, financial sustainability, governance and for improving the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of services.

They drew attention to the Council's failure to:

- Properly understand its financial position during 2021/22 and 2022/23, and to continue to rely on the use of reserves to support the provision of services, which are at risk of being exhausted.
- Manage risks, including with respect to the existence of RAAC (reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete) in the Council's estate.
- Improve internal controls so that weaknesses identified and reported to management by Internal and External audit and other regulators are addressed promptly.
- Prepare materially accurate financial statements supported by adequate supporting working papers.
- Secure action to improve services to children.

Forvis Mazars determined that use of their statutory reporting powers under the Local Audit Accountability Act 2014 was necessary and issued a statutory recommendation formally to the Chief Executive on 12 December 2024.

They recommended that:

"The Council should, as a matter of urgency, develop a comprehensive Council wide improvement plan to reflect the transformation and cultural change needed across all departments, to ensure the Council can deliver the range, level and quality of services that it deems appropriate and within its statutory responsibilities in a financially sustainable way. As part of this, appropriate senior leadership and management is required to ensure the improvement plan delivers the required changes. Member oversight is needed to ensure the changes are embedded into the organisation."

#### 5.1 Council's response & Improvement Activity

The Council responded to the recommendation and prepared an improvement plan. The plan was endorsed by Audit Committee at a Special meeting on the 9th of January 2025 and subsequently reported to Council. The plan set out the following improvement actions, the plan addressed the areas raised in the improvement notice. Please see agenda and improvement plan. ([Public Pack](#))[Agenda Document for Audit Committee, 09/01/2025 19:00](#)

The improvement plan and Council progress has been reviewed at each Audit committee meeting ensuring that Members are updated and can track progress. In addition, the plan will be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

[Audit Committee Report - Councils Improvement Plan.pdf](#)  
[Agenda for Audit Committee on Tuesday, 8th April, 2025, 7.00 pm - Bury Council](#)

The improvement plan articulates the activity required to address the issues raised by our External Auditors. The progress against the plan is reviewed regularly. Alongside the improvement plan each Board has key activities to deliver improvements.

The governance arrangements set up to support the delivery of the improvement plan are now the Councils business as usual governance structure. The Council will continue to drive improvements through the Boards, this work will continue and the work of the Boards was reviewed six months from establishment. The review prepared a Board scorecard reviewing documentation to the Boards, supporting risk registers, attendance and highlight reports. It was noted that Officers and Members were positive about the progress of the Board however it identified the need to ensure that the highlight reports are aligned to the improvement plan alongside document consistency across the Boards. The Council will ensure the terms of reference for the Boards are regularly updated.

The work to deliver improvements is ongoing and will continue alongside the setting of the 2025/26 budget and finance control improvement delivery.

## 5.2 Governance

Six new Assurance Boards have been established, reporting into Executive Leadership Team and Members Assurance Group through a monthly highlight report which will also be shared with the Cabinet Members. The Boards will each be chaired by an Executive Director and attended by Directors/Assistant Directors and Senior service leads. The assurance boards will meet monthly, with clear Terms of Reference, work programmes, a lead Officer and action notes/action tracker. The Assurance Boards are:

- Finance Board – Chaired by the Director of Finance
- Governance and Assurance Board – Chaired by Director of Law & Governance
- Regeneration Board – Chaired by Executive Director of Place
- Commercial activity Board – Chaired by the Director of Finance
- Performance Delivery and Transformation Board - Chaired by the Executive Director of Transformation
- Property & estates Board – Chaired by the Executive Director of Place

The assurance framework which supports these boards has been developed further and finalised with a detailed Improvement Work Plan accompanied by quarterly milestones which are tracked through each Board's Highlight Report. The assurance framework details roles and responsibilities of Chairs, Deputies

and Leads of the Board. It determines attendance and sets out meeting expectations. Improvement activity is on-going across all Boards below sets out the improvement activity being undertaken by each Board.

A weekly Executive Leadership Team meeting has been established, chaired by the Chief Executive and with formal action notes and action tracking by the Chief Executive's PA. Attendance to include all Executive Directors and statutory officers. The standing agenda will include:

- Delivery of the improvement plan
- Corporate assurance, through a highlight report from each Board on a rotating basis and updates on workforce and budget monitoring
- The decision-making forward plan and meeting preparation
- The Greater Manchester interface
- Communications messages for dissemination

A weekly Member Assurance Group is held to facilitate private political briefing and challenge on key areas of risk, membership to include, the Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and the Chief Executive. Action notes and action log are to be produced and shared weekly at Executive Leadership Team. Other Officers attend by invitation. Key areas of focus include:

- Internal audit recommendations
- Financial transformation
- Estates, including the corporate landlord, and estates compliance
- Project Safety Valve

A consistent structure, including a standardised agenda will be applied to Departmental Management Teams, which will support the Board structure by providing oversight and assurance of Business-as-Usual activity including workforce and budget management. Standard Agenda to include:

- Operational overview and update, including update/feedback to Directors from Executive Leadership Team
- Actions/issues from Assurance Boards
- Highlight reports from corporate business partners, provided on at least a quarterly basis
- Decision making

The Strategic Leaders' Group of Council Directors will continue to meet on a quarterly basis with a specific remit to develop a high-performance culture. Elected Member Oversight is provided via regular reporting into the Council's Audit Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. A standardised agenda is used for Cabinet Portfolio Meetings, which will include internal audit reports and assurance board highlight report.

### 5.3 Financial Strategy

The delivery of the 2025/26 budget is of vital importance to the organisation and to ensure leadership and oversight of this the Director of Finance Chairs a monthly strategic finance board, made up of senior officers from all of the service directorates, with responsibility for monitoring delivery of the in-year revenue budget and capital delivery programme and production of the subsequent years' revenue budget, capital programme and medium term financial strategy.

The Council has a Financial Transformation programme, the key elements to this are:

- Zero based budgeting
- Finance service improvement including restructure of the finance service
- New Procurement and Contract management operating model
- Balanced 2026/27 budget set
- Introduction of automation and self service in financial processes
- Greater use of Unit 4 and moving it to a cloud-based system which is due for launch April 2026.
  - It has been recognised that the current Financial Management System is nearing the end of its lifecycle, which limits efforts to modernise. Challenges include fragmented financial processes, reliance on manual tasks, and a lack of self-service options for staff and suppliers.
  - There are also number of inherent risks and compliance concerns regarding the existing system alongside high reliance on manually based financial transaction activities which is affecting the efficiency of the finance service and the wider organisation.

[Unit 4 Contract Cabinet Report 25 September 2024 PART A.pdf,](#)  
[Decision - Unit 4 System Upgrade & Transformation Strategic Partner Contract Award - Bury Council](#)

The Finance Board has a detailed 2026/27 budget timetable agreed setting out the approach, workstreams and timelines supporting production of proposals to address the structural funding gap. This will build on the agreed strategy and involve a zero based budget review of all council services and identification of proposals that will enable a balanced budget to be set without recourse to reserves over the current medium term financial strategy. The timetable and approach will include the identification of additional capacity requirements to support the budget work and be funded from the ongoing capital receipt flexibilities in place to support council and service transformation.

Development of budget proposals, involving the wider workforce, on a service basis through consideration of:

- The key cost drivers affecting their services.
- Current service performance levels including a productivity assessment and how they compare to benchmark councils and 'best in class'.

- Current service standards being operated to and the scope for changes in those standards including any elements of the service that could be stopped or reduced.
- Consideration of different models of service delivery.
- Opportunities from implementing different ways of working, including self-service if appropriate.
- The impact of their proposals on other service areas i.e. either in requiring their input and support in delivering the change or in potentially increasing costs elsewhere.
- Opportunities for additional income generation.
- The impact of their proposals on the customer

The finance service restructure has a number of key milestones which are overseen by the Boards:

- Consult on Phase One of new Finance Structure
- Begin recruitment to Phase One of new Finance Structure
- Develop Phase Two of new Finance Structure for consultation informed by the Unit 4 upgrade transformation programme.

#### 5.4 Corporate Core

During the year the core has established and coordinated the new Board governance structures and ensured that the programme of improvement is driven by the organisation with Executive and statutory officers working to the Chief Executive.

During this period there have been organisational changes within the core to improve its approach and ways of working. The appointments of a new S151 officer and Director of Housing have strengthened the delivery of services. The Legal Services Team continue to hold the LEXCEL accreditation. The Housing Team have undertaken a preparedness for regulation review details of which are set out below. The Housing Advisory Board has continued to work to deliver service improvements for our tenants including ensuring a strong tenant voice in coproduction of our policies. In addition, Cabinet decision making has approved a number of reports delivering improvements to our tenants, including delivery of the major project works.

The corporate peer review which took place on December 2023 was published in 2024, The peer review found that the Council had “really stepped up” in its place leadership, had a clear vision for inclusive growth and was a strong partner in regeneration schemes. The team noted improvements in the financial position whilst noting the challenges that remained. The leadership of the Leader and Chief Executive was noted alongside their role in Greater Manchester. Following the Peer review the Council has updated its Corporate Plan to reflect this feedback.

#### 5.5 Place Directorate

On 4th December 2024 Cabinet agreed to structural changes which has formed the Place Directorate, in doing so the Council moved from five Directorates to four through Business Growth and Infrastructure merging with the Operations Department. Extensive staff consultation took place. The service has undertaken a

number of staff engagement sessions and used a coaching ethos to develop its teams.

The service has adopted the revised governance arrangements however the major projects work have continued to be overseen by the Regeneration and Sustainability Board; a revised Estates Board operates with a broader remit alongside reporting to Executive Leadership Team and Members Assurance Group.

## 5.6 Adult Social Care

In February 2025, the Local Government Association carried out a peer review, which was to provide a preparation for the forthcoming CQC inspection of the services. The review was with the Council and our partners, the challenge was to assess the ability of the adult social care service to deliver good services to people, as well as its preparedness for a Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessment. The purpose of a peer challenge is to help an authority, and its partners assess current achievements, areas for development, and capacity to change. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government and adult social care to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, and material that they read. The team were on-site in Bury for three days from the 11–12 February 2025.

### [LGA ASC Preparation for Assurance Peer Challenge Report](#)

The peer challenge team produced a feedback report which identified strengths and also makes some suggestions for actions. It found:

- A passionate and committed workforce
- A clear and well-articulated improvement journey
- Staff reported feeling well-equipped to carry out their roles effectively, with access to the necessary resources and support
- Strong and self-aware leadership and visible and approachable
- Financial commitment to adult social care
- Effective management of waiting lists
- Exemplary integration with health services
- Strong provider relationships and quality assurance
- Effective safeguarding partnership working
- Commitment to co-production
- Robust oversight of data, quality, and finance

The following recommendations were made:

- Embedding safeguarding awareness across all teams
- Enhancing support and engagement for carers
- Embedding Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) across all teams
- Improving website accessibility and communication clarity
- Expanding commissioning beyond accommodation-based support

## 5.7 Children Services

During 2024/25, Ofsted completed their 6th and final monitoring visit under the ILACS framework. Monitoring visits are thematic in nature but always consider the impact of leaders which includes workforce, performance management, quality assurance and management oversight. Our 6th monitoring visit took place in October 2024 and was focused on the 'front door' including contacts, referrals and re-referrals, step-up from and step-down to Early Help, child in need assessments, management of allegations against professionals who work with children and the emergency management of concerns for children outside normal office hours.

Inspectors noted positive progress in ensuring that children are helped and protected at the earliest opportunity:

“Continued significant council investment has increased workforce capacity and management stability at all levels. A refreshed and dynamic approach to recruitment is attracting more social workers into Bury. The pace of improvement has stepped up since the appointment of a permanent director of social care and early help in May 2024, and this is bringing a renewed positivity across the workforce and supporting a clarity of vision and clearer expectations about practice standards. There is increased visibility of the senior leadership team, and social workers are now more involved in service planning.

There is now consistent application of thresholds at the front door. The relocation of the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) back into local authority offices is enabling stronger relationships with the initial response team (IRT), richer multi-agency information-sharing and a timelier response for children. A refreshed approach to performance management is supporting improvements in the quality and timeliness of assessments, visits, initial child protection conferences and supervision.

There is more to do to ensure that the police consistently refer concerns relating to incidents of domestic abuse to the MASH in a timely way.”

There have been two DfE Reviews completed in the reporting period, in April 2024 and January 2025. These are part of the arrangements under the Improvement Notice issued to the Council in December 2021 and are led by Bury's DfE Adviser and DfE Senior Case Lead.

In April 2024, the review included discussions with senior leaders from Childrens Social Care, Education, Health and Police and focus groups of practitioners. The review recognised continued progress around recognised areas for development, including improved working relationships across different areas and improved links with education both the Virtual School and also within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Partners highlighted a need to strengthen the Early Help offer and processes and a need to improve communications particularly in respect of the Family Safeguarding model.

In January 2025, DfE met with practitioners, independent scrutineer and Family Safeguarding Strategic Partners and saw a committed leadership team making positive progress. They noted good engagement and communication with staff in direct response to feedback in the previous review. Progress in relation to

embedding the Family Safeguarding model had been impacted by churn in staff including leaders in this area.

DfE reviews always include meetings with the Chief Executive, Lead Member for Children's Services, Executive Director for Children's Services and Director for Early Help & Children's Social Care. They felt our self-evaluation demonstrates that we know ourselves well. They saw evidence of a mature safeguarding partnership with strengthened challenge and improved grip across the partnership.

In addition, in August 2024 Mark Riddell MBE, the DfE National Adviser for Care Leavers, undertook a follow-up visit focusing on our care leavers service. Feedback was positive, recognising a shift in our leadership and management approach and clear evidence of progress since the original review in May 2023.

In February 2025, we received a visit from Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) as part of their work with Local Authorities to support work in preventing youth homelessness. They met with staff and young people to explore what is working well in Bury and how we can strengthen practice.

Following the Local Area SEND inspection of February 2024 and the subsequent Improvement Notice issued in May 2024, the post-inspection action plan was formed in consultation with all local partners, including the parent carer forum, drafted and approved without amendment by the DfE/Ofsted in June 2024. Following this, an improvement board formed, independently chaired by an experienced ex-Director of Children's Services and on which all partners are members, including members from the Department for Education, NHS England and parent/carers. There has been one DfE stocktake assessing progress being made overall (December 2024), and 2 'deep dives', focusing on specific areas within the post-inspection action plan (Preparing for Adulthood and the Graduated Approach). All have been positive on the progress being made by the local area.

We also continue to work with the Department for Education in relation to Project Safety Valve which with Bury being one of the first councils to enter into a formal Safety Valve agreement on 19 March 2021 and was put in place to address the financial pressures on the high needs block (SEND) caused by escalating demand. Whilst there is currently a significant deficit on this block and which reflects the national challenge of increasing demand, the council has undertaken extensive work in repairing and rebuilding Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services within the borough as part of the Safety Valve programme which has included rebuilding the Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) team, reworking the EHCP process and launching a graduated approach.

The work undertaken to date has had a positive impact compared to many other councils who are reporting significant increases in their deficits, however demand pressures remain. This increase in demand has resulted in a necessary change in the deficit reduction profile with the council working with the DfE to agree a revised DSG Management Plan that will remain under close scrutiny and review through the Finance Board and Member Assurance Group.

This is a national issue and one which is being actively monitored and reviewed. At present there is a statutory override which means the Council does not have to fund the deficit. There is no confirmed national solution to this challenge at present, and the override expires at the end of 2027/28, the future of this arrangement is dependent on the outcome of the government SEND reforms. As part of its financial planning the Council holds a DSG reserve which covers these costs. However, going forward if the statutory override is removed the deficit would become a significant financial challenge to the Council. Given the size of the national deficit with the majority of councils forecasting increases in their deficits, it is anticipated that there will be a solution identified by government to address the risks to many council's future financial sustainability should the override be removed.

We continue to work with other local authorities as part of the DfE funded Sector Led Improvement Programme (SLIP). In the last 12 months, this has included:

- Continuing work with Hertfordshire around our Family Safeguarding model of practice, including delivery of culture workshops and support to senior leaders.
- Additional sector-led support with Lancashire County Council to support the implementation of our Family Safeguarding model by working alongside practitioners.
- Salford support to our Care Leavers service, working with managers and practitioners to support practice improvement with a focus on pathway planning for our young people
- Peer review of our Fostering service from Warrington

Learning and recommendations from all the activity described above is woven into our Improvement Plan and other relevant plans – this includes our Corporate Parenting Plan and service plans

#### 5.8 Head of Audit and Risk Management Annual Opinion 2024/25

Based upon the results of the audit work undertaken during the year, the Head of Audits opinion is that the Authority's control environment provides limited assurance that the significant risks facing the Authority are addressed.

Some fundamental and significant recommendations have not been fully implemented during the year. However, the recommendations made had been accepted by management and are in the sight of the Governance and Assurance Board (GAB) and the Members Assurance Group.

Towards the end of the 2024/25 year, whilst a number of Limited Assurance reports were still being issued, the Internal Audit Team were starting to see an improvement on numbers of recommendations being addressed by the time the second follow up has been completed, thus fewer recommendations being reported as outstanding to the Governance and Assurance Board. This suggests that the work of the Governance and Assurance Board is positively contributing to the improvement of Governance across the Council however further improvement is needed.

- External Auditor’s Review of the Effectiveness of Governance Arrangements - The Council’s external auditor is Forvis Mazars. They submit progress reports and their Annual Audit Report to Audit Committee.
- CIPFA Financial Management Code 2019 (FM Code) - a series of financial management standards set out the professional standards needed if a local authority is to meet the minimum standards of financial management acceptable to meet fiduciary duties to taxpayers, customers and lenders. The Financial Management Code (FM Code) is designed to support good practice in financial management and to assist local authorities in demonstrating their financial sustainability. The code is not a set of rules to be followed but a set of principles in a format that matches the financial management cycle and supports governance in local authorities. The authority carried out an assessment to note the level of compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management code in 2022/23, that was presented to Audit Committee on the 12 October 2022. A number of areas were identified where improvements were required, and these are currently being addressed through a Financial Improvement Plan which is monitored through the Member Assurance Group. A new assessment will be undertaken in 2025/26.
- The Chief Finance Officer has examined the major assumptions used within the budget calculations and associated risks. The Medium-Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy have been updated to reflect the 2024/25 budget position. The 2024/25 budget was approved by Council on 21 February 2024 and balanced with the use of £15m reserves. The Finance Improvement Board is supporting the Council to identify savings to meet the MTFP budget gap and remove requirement to use reserves to meet future years budgets.
- Annual Report to Annual Council - this report is submitted regarding the Council Constitution. The report also covers the work of the Standards Committee and any other Governance changes.

## **6. Action Plan: Governance Challenges for 2024/25 Update**

The review of governance arrangements identified 7 main areas where the Council would focus its efforts during 2024/25, to address changing circumstances and challenges identified. These are set out in the section below.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Activity</b>
Adult Social Care - Policy review, and policy and strategy development to be guided by national and regional learning and best practice associated with preparedness for CQC inspections. Continued transformation of Adult Social Care in the borough in the face of increasing demand and significant financial challenge.	Reports to Cabinet setting out performance and improvements made by the Department <a href="#">Cabinet Report ASC Performance report Q4 24-25.pdf</a> <a href="#">Adult Social Care Performance Quarter Four Report 202324.pdf</a> <a href="#">Adult Social Care Performance Quarter One and Quarter Two Report 202324.pdf</a>
Joint Adult Social care and Childrens Services on preparation	In January 2025 there was a SEND deep-dive with the DfE focusing on

<p>for adulthood for those likely to be eligible for adult care under the Care Act.</p>	<p>preparation for adulthood where we shared our progress to enhance provision along the Preparing for Adulthood journey including a workshop with colleagues from education, health and social care supported by the NDTi (National Development Team for Inclusion). Work has started to improve take-up of supported internships; and expand provision and meetings with CAMHS and other health services focused on improving transitions.</p> <p>We have also continued with the work started prior to the SEND Local Area inspection in adult transitions including a dedicated social work team, joint boards and a best practice protocol. Our SEND Employment Forum has been established with first meeting scheduled for September.</p>
<p>Refresh the Highways Asset Management Plan</p>	<p>The Council has produced a highway asset management plan, <a href="#">Highway Asset Management Plan (HAMP) - Bury Council</a></p>
<p>Prepare for the inspection of social housing by the regulator following the introduction of the Social Housing Regulation Act.</p>	<p>The Council in October 2024 had a mock inspection carried out by Altair. Altair produced a report with recommendations, the Council has a plan with oversight from the Director of Housing to ensure that the Council is fully prepared for the inspection. Political Leadership is provided by the Cabinet Member for Housing. Using the new Consumer Standards, no major issues were found, and several good practices were highlighted. Altair praised our Property Compliance and our fair treatment of tenants. They also appreciated how we listen to tenant voices and make sure our services meet residents' diverse needs.</p> <p>As expected, areas for improvement were identified across the housing service, focussing on repairs, ASB, engagement, data, governance and the website. This has helped us to</p>

	prioritise our action plans going forward more effectively. <a href="#">Preparing for Regulatory Inspection - Bury Council</a>
Develop the risk management strategy Develop and provide staff training on anticipated Procurement Act changes, due to be implemented Spring 2025.	The Audit committee receive regular risk updates and the Governance and Assurance Board received reports, the Council's risk manager is a member of the Board. <a href="#">Risk Management strategy - Risk Management Strategy June 2024.pdf</a>

## 7. Governance Challenges for 2025/2026 Onwards

In developing the action plan for 2025/26 the Council has taken in to account the improvement notice from our external auditor and has considered wider sources to identify the key challenges this includes matters from regular meetings of statutory officers, consideration of risks identified in the Corporate Risk Register and emergent challenges identified by the work of Internal Audit.

Action	
Improvement plan activity – delivery of the improvement plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of the Boards</li> <li>• Audit committee – consider improvement plan at each meeting</li> <li>• Overview &amp; scrutiny Committee – to scrutinise delivery of the improvement plan</li> </ul>
Financial sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish the PMO &amp; governance framework.</li> <li>• Design a new Chart of Accounts aligned with Transformation objectives</li> <li>• Upgrade the Unit4 ERP system to prepare for migration into the Cloud</li> <li>• Initiate procurement transformation and organisational redesign projects</li> <li>• Develop a comprehensive change management plan to guide staff through process &amp; system change.</li> <li>• Integrate &amp; modernise financial management</li> <li>• Implementation &amp; recruitment</li> </ul>

	<p>to a new finance service structure to address capacity issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure stabilisation, system upgrade and enhance existing systems</li> <li>• Implement Unit4 Cloud based ERP system.</li> </ul>
Governance oversight of the close down of Six Town Housing Company	<p>Internal governance to oversee the closure and full compliance with the Regulator requirements. All processes from development of a plan and timetable including regular reports to commercial Board Cabinet oversight and decision making. Housing Advisory Board updated and to oversee tenant engagement.</p>
Preparedness for the children's statutory changes	<p>The proposed Government changes – families first will bring about a whole system approach to reform bringing together family support workers in to a single service. Local safeguarding partnerships will need to publish refreshed threshold document and updated local protocols.</p>

## 8. Conclusion

The Council's governance arrangements have been subject to significant strengthening during the final quarter of the year due to a lack of robustness in its internal control arrangements. This report sets out the arrangements in place pre and post January 2025. The report notes the work undertaken to reflect and review the Council's governance framework. The Authority is committed to ensuring this is effectively monitored and tested. The arrangements set out in the report will continue to be subject to robust check and challenge. Although progress have been made within the final quarter following the adoption of the revised arrangements further work is required to fully embed these changes.

The Council remains committed to delivering high standards of governance and ensuring that its systems and processes support the achievement of strategic objectives and the delivery of quality services to residents.

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Leader of the Council

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Chief Executive