



OXFORD
CITY COUNCIL

Annual Governance Statement

2025 – 2026



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Executive Summary

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Introduction

The Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and including arrangements for the management of risk.

The quality of governance arrangements is of paramount importance to Oxford City Council to enable sound decision-making with high-quality information and a good understanding of risk.

Oxford City Council is responsible for ensuring that:

- Its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards;
- Public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for;
- Public money is used economically, efficiently and effectively; and
- There is a sound system of governance, incorporating the system of internal control

The review of governance arrangements leading to this Annual Governance Statement for 2025/ 26 has been conducted in line with the following.

1. The **Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015** (“the Regulations”) which require that:
 - The Council must conduct a review, at least once a year, of the effectiveness of its system of internal control;
 - Findings of this review should be considered by the Council;
 - The Council must approve an Annual Governance Statement; and
 - The Annual Governance Statement must accompany the Statement of Account
2. The Council’s **Best Value duty under the Local Government Act 1999** to support continuous improvement in how its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness and the Best Value Standards and Intervention Guidance published in May 2024.

The guidance emphasises seven key themes that define best value.



3. Lastly the **CIPFA/SOLACE Delivery Good Governance in Local Government Framework (2016)** as set out in the **Corporate Code of Corporate Governance**. These set out the Council's governance framework, the steps taken to ensure that it is effective and establishes key actions that will be put in place to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of its arrangements.



Code of Corporate Governance demonstrates our dedication to effective leadership in Oxford. Public confidence in our councillors and officers is essential for our effectiveness. Good corporate governance, characterized by transparency, integrity, and accountability, is the cornerstone of the credibility and trust in our services.

Following best practice guidelines, our local Code of Corporate Governance encompasses five key areas:

- community focus
- service delivery arrangements
- structures and processes
- risk management and internal control
- standards of conduct

Preparing for Local Government Re-Organisation (LGR) has been a significant focus for Oxford City Council in 2025-26 as it has for the other Oxfordshire councils. Oxford City Council proposed Three Councils which can be found here [The three-councils model | 3Councils](#). On 16 July 2026 the government announced its minded to decision to implement these proposals and create three unitary authorities for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.

On 7 September 2026 the Government announced that it will review its own LGR plans to replace two-tiers of local government with unitary authorities including Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. It means LGR plans for 14 other areas, including Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, have been put on hold with immediate effect while the review takes place

Review of the Effectiveness of the Council's Governance Framework

1. Governance Framework

The Council's Code of Corporate Governance sets out the principles the Council commits itself to in terms of its corporate governance arrangements and the steps it will take to enact them.



The Council's Code of Corporate Governance is delivered via the Council's governance framework. The governance framework comprises the rules, systems, processes, cultures and values by which the authority is directed and controlled and various routes through which it accounts to members, officers and citizens.



2. Key elements of the Council's governance framework

Oxford City Council's constitution outlines how the Council operates, makes decisions, and ensures efficiency, transparency, and accountability (see [Constitution | Oxford City Council](#)).

The Council has followed the Strong Leader model since 2011.

Council responsibilities are legally categorised into three areas:

- **Council responsibilities:** These are typically handled by the full Council but may be delegated to committees or officers
- **Executive responsibilities:** Handled by the Council Leader, who may delegate to committees, individual councillors, or officers
- **Local Choice responsibilities:** The Council decides whether these fall under the Council or the Leader

Council responsibilities

- **Full Council:** Makes final decisions on the Council's Budget and Policy Framework
- **Oxford City Planning Committee:** Deals with specific types of planning applications
- **Planning Review Committee:** Deals with applications determined called-in following determination at the Oxford City Planning Committee
- **General Purposes Licensing Committee, and Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee:** Recommends licensing policies for approval at Full Council and sets up the decision taking arrangements for individual applications
- **General Purposes Licensing Casework Sub-Committee, and Licensing and Gambling Acts Casework Sub-Committee:** Determines individual applications applicable to the relevant powers and duties for each sub-committee
- **Appointments Committee:** Appoints the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executives and Directors
- **Investigations and Disciplinary Committee:** Handles disciplinary hearings for the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executives and Directors

The LGA Peer Challenge in 2024-25 acknowledged that Oxford City Council has a very ambitious agenda for a council of our size and delivering on that ambition (which also underpins our financial strategy) requires leadership capability and capacity. This echoes concern across the organisation about capacity and workloads.

In 2025-26 following a period of consultation, agreement was reached on a new senior leadership structure. There is a commitment in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan to achieve £1.4m of ongoing management savings by April 2026 and to ensure that the management structure of the council is fit for purpose moving forward.

Key elements of the change include:

- Streamlining the senior leadership arrangements to increase strategic focus, improve collaboration and increase efficiency.
- Reducing the cost of senior management by 21% per cent through a reduction in the number of posts
- Achieving £0.3M net savings per annum

Executive responsibilities

- **Cabinet:** Makes decisions on matters outlined in the Constitution and recommends policies and budget to the full Council
- **Council officers:** Handle decisions on executive responsibilities not covered in the Constitution.
- The **Chief Executive**, Caroline Green, who is supported by two **Deputy Chief Executives**, one for 'Place' and one for 'Citizen & City Services'. Together they provide the strategic direction and corporate leadership of the council; driving future innovation and transformation; coaching and developing senior managers and developing relationships with strategic partners.
- Eight **Service Directors** provide leadership, strategic direction and accountability for the performance of the cluster of services within their remit and are the strategic advisors to the council on policy and projects in their area. They also develop leadership and management capabilities within their teams.
- Together the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executives and Service Directors make up the **Corporate Leadership Team (CLT)**

3. Scrutiny & Review

The Scrutiny Committee

The Scrutiny Committee is cross-party and made up of non-executive (backbench) councillors. Its role is to carry out a 'check and balance' and 'critical friend' function to the Cabinet by reviewing policies, decisions and key issues affecting residents. It meets monthly.

Scrutiny operates to provide public assurance that the Cabinet is carrying out its business effectively, providing value for money and taking the best decisions it can to improve public services and the quality of life for the residents of Oxford. Scrutiny may carry out research, undertake reviews and hear evidence from independent experts.

Scrutiny considers a wide range of matters which in the 2025/ 26 year included maintenance of watercourses and ditches; the budget for ward members and the Community Infrastructure Levy, funding for the Oxpens River Bridge, fly tipping and litter management, support for the nighttime economy, the Leisure Annual Plan, the annual review of the Council of Sanctuary framework

Scrutiny sets up annual Working Groups at the first meeting of the year and Review Groups for shorter policy focussed reviews throughout the year:

- **Finance & Performance Working Group** - cross-party working group to scrutinise all finance and budgetary issues and decisions, as well as monitoring wider Council performance as part of meeting our strategic objective of a **Well Run Council** (see <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/policies-plans-strategies/strategy/8>). Its work includes conducting an in depth annual review of the Council's budget proposals and medium term financial strategy. and reviewing the performance of the Council's wholly-owned companies Oxford City Housing Limited, Oxford Direct Services Limited and Oxford Direct Services Trading Limited.

- **Housing and Homelessness Working Group** - cross-party standing panel to scrutinise all landlord and strategic housing and homelessness functions, services and issues. This Working Group supports our strategic priority of **Good Affordable Homes** (see <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/policies-plans-strategies/strategy/4>) . In 2025/26 this included reviewing quarterly performance reports and key policy proposals.
- **Climate & Environment Working Group** cross-party working group to scrutinise climate and environmental issues within the city, testing Oxford's climate resiliency, as part of Oxford's strategic priority to become a **Zero Carbon Council** (see <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/policies-plans-strategies/strategy/7>) . It monitors the delivery of our existing strategies, climate policies and projects including the Council's net zero aims, the delivery of district heat network, air quality action plan, and development of infrastructure to support sustainable energy initiatives.



The Audit and Governance Committee

This oversees internal control, risk management, and financial reporting and is tasked with reviewing and considering improvements to corporate governance in general. As at 7 July 2026 the corporate risk register included has five red risks and ten amber risks; an increase of one since the previous report. The new risk relates to increased staff involvement in LGR workstreams which could possibly impact the Council's ability to deliver on its existing priorities.

In 2025/26 the policies reviewed by the committee included the anti-fraud, bribery and anti-corruption policy, and the Counter-Fraud report noting that four of the five key performance targets had been achieved. In reference to the target for the number of housing applications, the Counter Fraud Manager explained that this was only recorded as not being achieved due to outcomes from a data matching exercise not being applied in time for the individual statistics to be available at the time of the committee.

The Audit Planning Report 2025/26 identified that the Council was not fully prepared for the audit and that improvements were required in relation to:

- Quality and timeliness of audit evidence, with working papers and supporting documentation frequently below the standard required
- Responsiveness to audit queries and delays in providing information necessary to complete planned procedures
- Capacity within the finance team to support the audit effectively and to address issues on a timely basis
- The availability of key finance personnel to support the execution phase of the audit in accordance with the agreed project plan.
- Support for key accounting judgements and estimates, particularly in relation to PPE and Investment Property valuations
- Volume of audit and disclosure adjustments, indicating weaknesses in year-end financial reporting and review processes.
- The completeness of the draft financial statements submitted for audit, including required IFRS 16 related entries and disclosures.

Standards Committee

This oversees allegations of breaching the Councillors' Code of Conduct. The Standards Committee has met regularly throughout the year. During 2025/ 26 there were nine complaints against Councillors, six of these were dismissed. Three allegations of breaches were upheld, two resulted in public censure of councillors concerned and one was resolved informally by way of apology. The Committee also oversees training offered to Councillors and considers for suggestions for future training. The Local Plan Briefing was particularly well attended.

All standing committees provide leadership, develop and set policy and undertake scrutiny of relevant functions where they think it appropriate.



4. Corporate Governance & Decision Making

The Council's Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) is responsible for the overall management of the Council.

CLT includes the Council's statutory officers who also meet separately on a regular basis to review governance and financial matters arising.

The Council's **statutory officers**

- **Caroline Green**, Chief Executive and the Head of Paid Service, leads and takes responsibility for the work of the paid staff of the Council.
- **Alistair Rush**, Group Finance Director/ Council's Chief Finance Officer and s151 Officer, is responsible for safeguarding the Council's financial position and ensuring value for money.
- **Emma-Louise Jackman**, Director of Law, Strategy and Governance/ Monitoring Officer, with the Chief Executive is responsible for ensuring legality and promoting high standards of officer and councillor conduct.

Organisational Change Board oversees transformation programmes and organisational changes including new and upgraded ICT systems and changes to working practices.

The Organisational Change Board is chaired by the is chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive, City and Citizen Services, supported by Service Directors, the PMO and Fit for the Future Change Team.

The Board is responsible for the approval, prioritisation and delivery of projects where there is an impact on the day-to-day operations of the Council.

There are existing projects and programmes of work already planned. New projects, where they will commit resource and finances must be reviewed, approved, and prioritised by the Organisational Change Board. Decisions are made in accordance with the Council's Constitution at sections 18.12 (project approval) and 19.17 (contract award).

Development Board oversees land or property development requiring new funding via the capital programme.

The Organisational Change Board is chaired by the is chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive, Place, supported by the relevant Service Directors and senior officers.

Any new capital project ideas require approval via a number of controlled gateway stages in order to be included in the capital programme and proceed to delivery.

This process follows the Council's Capital Strategy and is overseen by Development Board.

5. Local Government Reorganisation

In late 2024 the Government published its English Devolution White Paper, setting out plans for a new wave of local government reorganisation. For Oxfordshire this means replacing the current two-tier council system of District/ City and County Councils with unitary councils delivering all local services in one area. Oxford City Council proposed creating three unitary councils for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, including a Greater Oxford unitary authority to include Oxford City and the surrounding parishes to create greater efficiency and stronger local leadership.

The intention behind three unitary councils is to enable governance which is more tailored and representative to local need and able to respond to different priorities of urban and rural areas. A Greater Oxford will support local leaders to better understand and tackle local challenges. It supports increased community engagement in democratic processes, the design of services and community empowerment more generally. It allows each area to speak for itself and its own identity and priorities.

Local government reorganisation will play a major role in defining the future of devolution, accountability, and service delivery across England.

On 16 July 2026 the Government announced that Three Councils is the preferred proposal with the creation of three unitary councils: Greater Oxford, Northern Oxfordshire and The Ridgeway Councils.

On 7 September 2026 the Government announced that it will review its own LGR plans to replace two-tiers of local government with unitary authorities including Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. It means LGR plans for 14 other areas, including Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, have been put on hold with immediate effect while the review takes place

The review will be led by Jim McMahon, the Minister for Local Government, Devolution and Regional Growth

Making the announcement in Parliament on 7 September, Angela Rayner, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government said the move followed fresh legal advice and was taken to ensure she was satisfied LGR was robust and aligned with new government priorities

The Government said this did not mean the end of LGR and it “remains committed to effective and sustainable local government and simplifying these structures”

6. Risk Management

Effective risk management is an important component of the Council's governance framework and supports the achievement of the Council Strategy 2024-2028, the delivery of services and the fulfilment of statutory duties. The Council recognises that risk management is not about eliminating risk, but about enabling informed decision-making through the systematic identification, assessment, management and monitoring of risks. The Council's Risk Management Strategy and Toolkit provides a consistent framework for managing risk across services, projects, programmes and partnerships.

During 2025/26 the Council continued to strengthen its arrangements for risk management and governance. The revised Risk Management Strategy and Toolkit approved in April 2025 established a clearer framework for risk ownership, risk appetite, escalation, reporting and assurance. The Strategy supports a consistent approach to risk management across the

organisation and provides clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of Members, Corporate Leadership Team, directors, managers and risk owners

Governance is supported through oversight by the Risk Management Group, chaired by the Group Finance Director and comprising senior officers from across the Council. During 2025/26 the Group met on four occasions and reviewed eight service risk registers, providing challenge and assurance regarding risk identification, risk scoring and mitigation actions. The Group also considers emerging risks, major projects, and business continuity arrangements

The Corporate Leadership Team formally considered risk at eight meetings during 2025/26, ensuring regular scrutiny of the Corporate and Service Risk Registers. The Audit and Governance Committee received four risk management reports during the year, providing independent member challenge and assurance regarding the effectiveness of the Council's risk management arrangements

The Council maintains a Corporate Risk Register supported by Service Risk Registers. During the year, ten new risks were added to the Corporate Risk Register and eight risks were closed. At service level, twenty-nine new risks were identified and recorded, whilst thirteen risks were closed. There is an active approach to risk identification, review and management rather than a static compliance exercise

Significant progress has been made in strengthening risk management arrangements through the adoption of the new Risk Management Strategy and Toolkit, including the introduction of a clear risk appetite, the regular review of risks and scrutiny by the Audit and Governance Committee, Corporate Leadership Team and Risk Management Group.

7. Information Governance

The Information Governance Team has maintained the progress made in previous years primarily in enhancing the efficiency of processes within the Freedom of Information (FOI) function. Our on-time response rate was elevated by addressing inefficiencies that had previously hindered our performance.

The transformation initiative focused on process improvement, enhanced documentation, and the introduction of new technology to centralise our case management system. That system has also now been expanded to include Data Subject Access Requests, Data Breach logging, and Data Complaints in line with the recent Data Use and Access Act.

A dedicated network of 'designated contacts' across the organisation have been trained on how to use the system which has improved efficiencies and encouraged departmental ownership of the information request processes.

As a result of these changes, significant improvements were achieved:

- Timeliness rates surged as a result and were maintained over the course of the year despite an increase in the volume of requests received over the course of the year.
- Time spent on sending out contribution requests to colleagues was halved.
- The volume of contributions requiring follow-up further decreased.

The Team also rolled out new Freedom of Information and Data Protection training modules to all Council officers with the use of the new eLearning platform. The new platform enables managers to view the outstanding training requirements for their team which will reduce the time previously required of the team to manually track compliance for all council officers. The new platform also includes agency staff which the previous system was unable to support, therefore reducing the organisational risk levels since training is now mandatory for anyone working with personal data.

Data Protection audits by the team and the Internal Auditor have been conducted which have identified concerns over corporate record keeping in relation to retention schedules, Records of Processing Activity (ROPA) and data sharing logs. These have been reviewed, updated and also challenged in the various service areas as a result of the cyber incident in 2025. They were finalised early in 2026 and an annual review will be implemented by the Team in January 2027.

The updated organisation wide Retention Schedule has been published on the Council's website and the ROPA has been made available to all internal staff via the intranet.

The Team have worked hard on updating the Council's processes and privacy notices to adapt to the increasing prevalence of AI technologies, to ensure transparency and compliance with Data Protection principles.

In terms of corporate performance on requests made to the Council within the field of Information Governance in 2025/2026:

Freedom of Information Act/ Environmental Information Regulations Requests

- We received 900 FoIA/ EIR requests, an average of 75 a month. 91% of which were responded to within the required timeframe.
- 39 of the requests were subject to an internal review.
- 18 of the requests were referred to the Information Commissioners Office, though 12 of those pertained to two individuals.

There is a small increase in requests but overall the work remains static and compliance with the statutory deadlines for responses are well met.

Data Protection

- There were 73 data incidents/breaches
- 2 of the data breaches were serious enough to be referred to the ICO – they were closed by the ICO with no further actions required as they were content with the mitigations and preventative measures we had implemented.
- The Council had 182 Data Subject Access Requests (DSAR).
- No Data Subject Access Requests were subject to an internal review.

This is a 32% increase in the number of DSARs compared to the previous year which demonstrates the increased public awareness of individual's data rights.

There were 12% fewer data breaches likely due to the increased training and awareness activities rolled out by the Team. For example, targeted training sessions have been delivered to various departments as and when requested to reinforce the learnings gained from the online training module.

8. Cyber Security

In 2024-25 the Council invested in cyber security software following audit recommendations and Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) was deployed. The Council strengthened the awareness of Council's officers and members with further mandatory training on Cyber Security rolled out for staff on a range of topics such as password security, phishing emails and reporting suspicious activity.

The Council was subject to a cyber-attack in 2025/2026. The Council implemented its response plan and its multi-disciplinary Cyber Incident Response Team was stood up, supported by external technical, communication and legal services. The Council implemented its business continuity plans. The immediate incident lasting a number of weeks before systems were all restored.

The Council has completed a thorough post-incident review and put in place a structured remedial work programme of 151 identified actions which have been completed.

This work has moved the Council from a set of individual controls to a coherent operating model. A Cyber Security Operating Model and Assurance Plan has been established, structured around 25 control domains with named domain owners and mapped against the National Cyber Security Centre's Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) v4.0 — the framework now used by government cyber regulators, including through the GovAssure assurance scheme.

The Council's Cyber Incident Response Plan and supporting playbooks have been rewritten, and a programme of simulation and readiness exercises has been established to test the Council's response capability rather than rely solely on paper-based plans.

All ICT security policies and standards are revised and reissued annually; the latest revision was completed in June 2026 and published to the Cyber Incident Response Team SharePoint site, with intranet publication following in the week commencing 7 July 2026.

Cyber security is one of three named strategic objectives for ICT in 2026/27, alongside preparing the ICT service for Local Government Reorganisation and making the ICT team fit for purpose.

Actions from the Post Incident Review & Progress

- **Remedial action plan:** 151 actions identified; 121 complete, 11 in progress (around 7%), 19 superseded/cancelled as duplicates.
- **Staff training:** 75% completion of mandatory cyber security training last year. ICT is moving delivery to the People Team's training platform, which has stronger audit and completion-tracking features, with delivery beginning August/September 2026 and continuing on an ongoing basis.
- **Phishing testing:** a phishing simulation programme ran in the period between September and December 2025; ICT will reintroduce this alongside the refreshed training from August/September 2026, to test and improve staff preparedness.
- **Incidents:** no major security incidents have occurred since the 2025/26 event.
- **Patching:** all systems and user devices are patched at least monthly where patches are available, with critical patches applied on a shorter cycle. Devices are monitored daily and formally reported on monthly by SCC's Security Operations Centre, with a summary provided to the SIRO through the monthly ICT Board report.
- **MFA/conditional access:** user accounts are fully covered across all systems and services.
- **Cyber Security Operating Model and Assurance Plan:** sets out the Council's 25 control domains, named domain owners, and mapping to the NCSC Cyber Assessment Framework v4.0.
- **CIRT SharePoint site:** holds the Cyber Incident Response Plan, playbooks, and the published June 2026 revision of the ICT security policy suite.
- **ICT Policies pages of the intranet:** publishes the current ICT security policies and standards to all staff, with the June 2026 revisions due w/c 7 July 2026.

9. Housing – Role as Social Housing Landlord

Housing Consumer Standards

Following completion of a self-assessment against the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards in November 2025, the Council has continued to strengthen its arrangements to demonstrate compliance with the regulatory framework introduced through the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. The self-assessment identified areas requiring further development and informed a Housing Improvement Plan which has been overseen through an enhanced governance framework.

To strengthen oversight and provide greater assurance regarding the Council's position as a registered social housing landlord, a Housing Regulatory Assurance Framework was established during 2025-26. This includes the Housing Regulatory Assurance Task Group, chaired by the Chief Executive, together with the Members Assurance Group and the Tenant and Leaseholder Board. These arrangements have enhanced scrutiny, challenge and accountability across the Council, recognising that compliance with the Consumer Standards is a corporate responsibility requiring input and ownership from services across the organisation.

During 2025-26, the Council made significant progress in delivering improvements across the Consumer Standards. This included strengthening strategic leadership and oversight, implementing key housing policies informed by resident feedback, adopting a new Resident Involvement and Engagement Strategy, enhancing performance management and assurance arrangements, and strengthening tenant influence and scrutiny through the Tenant and Leaseholder Board.

A review of the self-assessment completed in June 2026 demonstrated tangible progress across all four Consumer Standards and provided increased assurance regarding the Council's regulatory position. The review also identified areas where further work is required to embed and evidence compliance consistently across housing services. Delivery of the Housing Improvement Plan will therefore continue during 2026-27, supported by the Housing Regulatory Assurance Framework, to ensure continuous improvement and readiness for regulatory inspection.

Housing Complaints

The Council has continued to strengthen its complaints handling arrangements in response to both the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and the Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.

During 2025-26, the Council handled 389 Stage 1 complaints and 88 Stage 2 complaints relating to landlord services. Whilst Stage 1 complaint volumes reduced slightly overall, Stage 2 complaints increased significantly. Performance in responding to complaints within Housing Ombudsman timescales declined during the year, with 54.6% of Stage 1 complaints and 28.4% of Stage 2 complaints responded to within the required timescales. A backlog of overdue cases highlighted the need for improvements in capacity, oversight and process effectiveness.

In response, the Council implemented a targeted recovery plan in January 2026, including additional staffing capacity, strengthened oversight and enhanced accountability arrangements. The backlog of overdue Stage 2 complaints was fully resolved during February 2026 and performance improved significantly thereafter. An end-to-end review of the complaints process was also undertaken to strengthen compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, improve the resident experience and ensure that learning from complaints is embedded more effectively across housing services.

The Council has strengthened governance and assurance arrangements for complaints through enhanced performance monitoring and reporting, including increased oversight of Stage 1 complaints handled by Oxford Direct Services on the Council's behalf. A new Housing Complaints Policy, developed with resident involvement and aligned to the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, was introduced during the year. In addition, a Resident Complaints Panel was established to provide independent tenant scrutiny of complaint themes, lessons learned and resulting service improvements.

The Housing Ombudsman issued 11 decisions relating to the Council during 2025-26, comprising 10 determinations and one case found to be outside jurisdiction. No findings of severe maladministration were made and no Complaint Handling Failure Orders were issued. Learning from complaints, Ombudsman investigations and resident feedback continues to inform service improvements across housing management, repairs, asset management and customer services. Improving complaint handling and ensuring that learning is translated into service improvements remains a key component of the Council's wider programme to strengthen compliance with the Consumer Standards and improve outcomes for residents.

10. Homelessness and Housing Needs including Temporary Accommodation

Oxford continues to face significant homelessness and temporary accommodation pressures, with homelessness presentations averaging 31 households per week and 358 households in Temporary Accommodation as at the end of June 2026. While increased council-owned, leased and self-contained provision has reduced reliance on hotels and Bed & Breakfast accommodation, demand remains exposed to volatile external pressures, particularly from private rented sector evictions and family evictions, both driven by high rents and persistent rental inflation.

The Council's experience of high levels of demand for homeless services and temporary accommodation is in line with the national picture and the pressures many Councils in London and the South East face.

Despite high numbers of households with children being placed into temporary accommodation, the Council is again fully compliant with the legislative requirement not to house such households in hotels and B&B for more than 6 weeks, as a result of maximizing Temporary Accommodation stock, and the establishment of a new Temporary Accommodation procurement framework.

The Council has implemented a comprehensive B&B elimination plan agreed with MHCLG, and the improvement against that has been extremely positive, however it remains a finely balanced improvement which we are therefore continuing to work to maintain and improve upon.

As a result of the mitigations, despite ongoing high Temporary Accommodation demand, the Council is currently on track to be within budget this financial year for Temporary Accommodation costs, and the current package of mitigations are sufficient to bring down costs in line with the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Oversight is provided through regular reporting to the Corporate Leadership Team, Cabinet Portfolio holder and the Leader and Deputy Leaders of the Council.

11. Corporate Complaints

The Corporate Complaints and Housing Complaints functions were separated out in April 2024 in line with the guidance and best practice and reflective of the fact each regime has its own ombudsman.

Corporate complaints (non-HRA) are managed in line with the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's code of conduct. There are still some areas where the Council is not compliant with the code, but we have an action plan in place to address these areas by the end of October. This includes a new complaints policy planned to go to Cabinet for approval in October 2026 which is currently out for consultation with Oxford residents.

Between May and September 2025, a significant backlog of complaints built up due to staff sickness which delayed the response times to our customers. Action was taken to second staff to clear the backlog which subsequently reduced month on month and now complaints are being managed with the majority cleared within LGSCO timescales.

In 2025/26, compared to the previous year, complaint volumes increased as follows:

- Stage 1 complaints by 39% to 1089 received
- Stage 2 complaints by 48% to 77 received

We have identified the Top 3 areas to focus on as follows:

- 36% of complaints received related to council tax with delays in processing change requests being the main reason. There is currently a significant backlog of work in the revenues and benefits area. Action is being taken by the Council to recruit additional resource, offer overtime and outsource a proportion of the work to an external provider to bring the backlog back to reasonable levels.
- 16% of complaints related to Housing (non-HRA) and actions are being taken to review the causes of these complaints, identifying trends and to work with the Housing Teams on identifying areas of improvement
- 7% of complaints related to the Contact Centre service with the waiting times to get through to an officer being one of the main reasons. A new Contact Centre telephony solution is being implemented in September 2026 with the aim to use chatbots, integrated webchat and AI to help reduce call volumes and reduce waiting times.

We are also exploring how we can use AI technology to help us generate complaints insights to highlight trends and interrogate council documents like procedures and policies quicker so that we can reduce the investigation time for our officers.

The Council's Ombudsman Link Officer works within the Team and has the responsibility for managing all Ombudsman cases for the council, including Housing. There were 70 Ombudsman cases received last year. Unfortunately, we do not have a comparison relating to the previous year as the volume of cases was not being monitored at this time. Volumes are now being captured and tracked closely.

A Vexatious Citizen policy was introduced in 2025 in line with the Local Government Ombudsman and Information Commissioners Officer guidance to ensure a clear and robust process for dealing with citizens who meet the thresholds set out therein and setting out clear expectations of the Council as to unacceptable treatment of Staff and Councillors. Vexatious cases are tracked and managed within the Team

BDO will be carrying out an audit in Quarter 2 of this year covering all the Council's complaints processes so that any areas of improvement can be identified and actioned accordingly.

12. Regeneration, Economy and Sustainability

Officers follow the current scheme of delegation to ensure good practice. The scheme of delegation is being reviewed and updated to ensure compliance with recent changes in the constitution.

This service area deals with complex projects and a close working with Legal Services is important. The directorate hosts one of the Council's Project Management Officers. It also works closely with Procurement and Legal and Democratic Services to ensure that the appropriate approvals are in place and to seek clarity where there are areas of uncertainty for specific items. Regular liaison meetings take place to review progress and identify and early identification of most complex elements (for example housing supply and regeneration). We have identified areas for improvement as part of the corporate on-boarding process especially for those new officers who have not worked in local government previously and providing guidance for teams that are not dealing with it as regularly. The PMO and development board processes have significant guidance to support those working on capital projects as well as having representation from Legal Services.

There are systems in place for keeping up to date with any changes of law and communicating these to stakeholders including regular liaison meetings with Legal Services for the areas of the directorate that work regularly on complex capital schemes where this is most relevant. Other areas would rely on internal communications from Legal Services and utilising 'lets talk and leadership conversations' plus managers disseminating corporate updates to teams through service days and team meetings.

There are processes in place for reviewing policies and procedures. For example:

- Currently reviewing guidance to officers regarding when it is appropriate to use Teckal companies for capital projects
- Providing training and guidance for staff on requirements for budget monitoring and forecasting on capital schemes deployed through the PMO.
- Through the PMO and Development Board process, reviewing whether further improvements can be made through our Agresso system to provide clearer information for decision makers on requirements being met to allow more efficient approvals.

We track progress through:

- regular team meetings and service days.
- senior management meetings look at success and areas for improvement.
- the corporate dashboard is used for item escalation and awareness.
- regular project level meetings take place.
- Considering the results of the annual staff survey results in team meetings and at service days to better understand feedback and identify areas for improvement.
- reviewing staff completion rates of mandatory training with additional monitoring by the Corporate Leadership Team.

We promote stakeholder engagement and transparency through our economy, environment and city centre teams as business as usual, including hosting several partnerships and stakeholder groups on key areas and issues. There is close working with our communications team to provide information on key work areas. With capital projects, engagement and transparency is more tailored to individual project. We are reviewing different engagement approaches on major capital projects to ensure that approaches are appropriate for the project and plans are being followed.

13. Our People

The completion rate for corporate mandatory training (other than cyber security which is reported in a separate section above) is 63%, an average across 8 courses. In March 2026, a new e-learning system was introduced. This supports more accurate tracking and reporting to increase completion rates.

As part of the Council's continuing commitment to behaving with integrity and demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law, the following actions have been taken:

- Regular 'Lunch & learn' sessions open to all staff take place to share the perspectives of diverse groups of employees and citizens. Sessions this year have covered refugees and asylum seekers, neurodiversity and understanding of the life experiences of staff from minority ethnic groups, the trans community and women.
- A new EDI survey was completed in partnership with our staff networks
- Delivery of Inclusive Decision-Making training to senior leaders with sessions taking place in June 2026 and more planned for October 2026.
- Staff engagement survey results - 76% response rate overall; 94% agree that "individual differences are respected, irrespective of things such as ethnicity, gender, disability, age and sexual orientation"
- Introduction of "Tell Jane", an anonymous and confidential advice line for bullying, harassment and discrimination concerns, led by the REACH staff network and following feedback from the EDI survey.

The Council values openness and comprehensive staff engagement. To encourage open and honest communication internally, senior leaders hold regular 'Open Door' sessions, and the Chief Executive and Deputy CEOs lead monthly online 'Leadership Conversations' for all people managers, and 'Let's Talk' sessions on a variety of topics for all staff.

The People Team continues to run our staff engagement survey on an annual basis.

To develop the council's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it, the Council has put in place support and training for managers including:

- All new managers now take part in a Manager Induction Workshop.
- An established programme of regular Manager Bitesize Training sessions, covering a range of people management topics such as attendance management
- Continuation of the Aspiring Managers Programme with a fourth cohort to commence in October 2026. This programme provides leadership and management development and is a positive action initiative offering priority places to those groups underrepresented at senior levels.
- Roll out of leadership coaching across Housing, Community Safety and Customer Services, as part of a support package for those in Front Line roles.



14. Health & Safety

Staff Health and Safety Compliance Training: 88% completion rate (average across 10 courses, of which 6 courses are for all staff and 4 are role specific courses).

An updated governance structure is now in place to cover all activities across the council, its wholly owned companies, external events and the Leisure Services' contract. A series of boards now seeks assurance for all activities covering people and property.

The health and safety policy has been updated to include new governance arrangements and now references, for additional clarity, obligations under the Social Housing regulation Act 2023. The policy is awaiting approval by Cabinet.

A new health and safety system with improved functionality is now operational although implementation took longer than planned. The system will provide better reporting and training modules have been improved.

Oxford Direct Services Limited (ODSL) have reported to the Council as the sole shareholder that it operates a mature and robust Occupational Health and Safety Management System that is independently certified to ISO 45001 and fully integrated with ISO 9001 and ISO 14001. This integrated management system provides a structured framework for identifying, controlling and monitoring risk, whilst ensuring continual improvement, legal compliance and strong governance. Board oversight, executive leadership, independent certification audits, internal audits, inspections, workforce consultation and performance monitoring provide multiple layers of assurance that occupational health and safety risks are effectively managed across the organisation. Health and safety is embedded within operational and strategic decision-making and supported by clear accountability at every level of the business.

ODSL's Managing Director holds overall responsibility for health and safety strategy and implementation. The Board provides oversight and governance. The Leadership Team monitors health and safety performance and drives improvement within their services. The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee provides formal consultation, oversight and performance review.

15. Policy & Partnerships

Quarterly updates on the Corporate Policy and Strategy timetable (CPST) continue to be reported to the CLT and through the quarterly Policy Officers Group. To further improve awareness, a dedicated policy and strategy section has also been added to the Monthly Horizon Scanning report, which is circulated internally to nominated officers and the CLT (a list of c95 colleagues).

In addition, at least monthly reviews are undertaken using an automated SmartSheet tool to monitor progress against policy and strategy review schedules, as well as the development of new corporate policies and strategies. This provides greater oversight of activity across the Council and helps ensure documents remain up to date and aligned.

A new Policy Dashboard has also been developed and incorporated into the CLT Dashboard. The dashboard provides a range of reports on the CPST, including policy status by service area and RAG rating, details policy reports, service-specific reports, and dedicated reports for HRA and ICT policies. This enables improved monitoring, reporting and management for the Council's policy and strategy framework.

The existing policy and strategy development toolkit has been superseded by a new **Policy and Strategy Transparency Project**, so that our policy and strategy documents are more accessible to both staff and citizens.

Our aim:

- Keep all council policies and strategies up-to-date
- Make them clearly visible to staff and the public

So that we:

- Maintain organisational compliance
- Strengthen transparency
- Ensure that we are fully prepared for Local Government Reorganisation

Why we are doing this:

- Supporting Local Government Reorganisation due diligence
- Reduces organisation risk
- Strengthens legal compliance
- Improves our handling of Freedom of Information requests, subject access requests and complaints
- Enables consistent decision-making
- Improves audit readiness
- Supports staff induction and organisational culture
- Improves public trust and transparency
- Makes policy review cycles manageable.

This work has been incorporated into the wider ONE Register programme, supporting improved governance and preparation LGR. Additional resources have now been allocated to support delivery.

Development of this new single corporate register of policies and strategies is underway, with clear ownership assigned to each document. The register will provide a central point of access to approved policies and strategies, supported by links from local service pages. Further work will strengthen governance processes and guidance, including updated materials on approval routes, governance requirements, and stakeholder engagement throughout the policy and strategy lifecycle. Arrangements are also being implemented to ensure ownership information remains accurate and that the register reflects the latest approved documents.

To support long-term sustainability, the Council is intending to move from a Smartsheet tool to Microsoft Lists, providing enhanced functionality, automated reporting, and improved oversight. Automated workflows will support ownership validation and review reminders, helping to keep documents current and governance responsibilities clear.



16. Procurement

Procurement offers the training courses which are advertised on the procurement intranet site including: Contract Management Training, New Starter Procurement Training, Tender Evaluation Training, Agresso Training, Procurement Portal Training and for suppliers How to Tender Workshops.

On the front page of the procurement Intranet site, the directorate details any forms which have been updated or introduced – with a link to the form.

Procurement have worked with Legal Services to provide guidance on terms and conditions of contract

The Intranet site has been completely re-designed in the last 12 months into procurement sections (Pre-Procurement / Below Threshold / Above Threshold/ Frameworks and mini competitions / Award documents / Contract handover / Contract changes / Specifications)

During 2025-26, Procurement has

- Reviewed all processes and procedures and guidance documents, updating when required
- All RFQ's, ITT's, CFP, Assessment Summaries, Evaluation Matrices have been published and continuously reviewed
- Delivered Contract Management training on a monthly basis
- Delivered Evaluation training on a monthly basis
- Begun publishing terms and conditions with more to follow.
- Has published its Terms and Conditions Guidance document.

A new Procurement Strategy was approved at December Cabinet 2025 to cover the period 2026 – 2029 incorporating areas such as Purpose, Ambition and Vision, Aims, Objectives and Key priorities, Measuring and Monitoring Performance, Contract Management, Social Value and Sustainable and Ethical Procurement.

A Business Partnering Model was introduced in 2025 to support the Council in the management of around 750 contracts with spend in the region of £220m on goods, services and works including capital (£130M excluding capital). This model has been a true success with service areas now working with their business partner. The procurement business partners meet once a week as a procurement team to discuss their individual service areas / challenges that they may have. They work together to resolve any issues which ensures consistent advice across the Council.

Procurement Board meet once a month to review new processes and procedures ensuring that best practice is created, challenges, trends and risks are identified and a plan to resolve is agreed. This is an opportunity for service areas across the council to highlight their concerns or challenges within the bounds of procurement. This has resulted in a procurement and legal process flow being created, agreeing to merge the Recommendation to Award report with the Officer decision form (reducing duplication of forms), support from Service areas for the Meet the Buyer Day that Procurement Hosted in February, storing of contracts, review of an e-signature contract, agreement that evaluation training must be undertaken before an officer can evaluate, allowing officers from other service areas to test the procurement intranet subsite prior to publication, a forum to notify service areas on new templates and guidance etc.

LGR preparation is underway. The Contract Register has been provided to the group of 7 councils to create an overarching register for the whole of Oxfordshire. This was followed by the pipeline of contracts.

The Strategic Procurement Manager chairs a fortnightly meeting with the Legal team to review performance related to tenders and contracts, resources, timing delays, framework usage, template documents etc. This is starting to provide the Council with consistency in advice being given, and strengthened the working relationship between Procurement and the Legal teams.



The volume of work undertaken through the procurement team has increased year on year with Business Partners leading on above threshold procurements and other members of the Procurement team supporting service areas to run their own below threshold procurements, however resource in service areas often prevents this and the Procurement team step in to lead a number of these. The largest procurement procedure used is below regulatory threshold closed (regulated) tenders (inviting up to 6 suppliers to bid).

The Procurement Act has become fully embedded at the Council and Transparency reporting has now commenced (the first notice for payment compliance under the new Procurement Act was successfully published in April 26. This involved the Procurement, Payments and ICT (Agresso) teams working together to identify the information required.

17. Council Owned Companies

The Council has three wholly owned companies:

- Oxford Direct Services Limited (ODSL),
- Oxford Direct Trading Services Limited (ODSTL) and
- Oxford City Housing Limited (OCHL).

OCHL, in turn has two wholly owned subsidiaries:

- Oxford City Housing Development Limited (OCH(D)L) and
- Oxford City Housing Investment Limited (OCH(I)L), trading as OXPlace although following the transfer of all properties held in OCH(I)L to the Council, this subsidiary is currently dormant.

In addition, the Council has a 50% share in the joint venture entities:

- Oxford West End Development Limited (OxWED) in partnership with Nuffield College for the development of land at Oxpens, and
- Barton Oxford LLP (BOLLP) in partnership with Grosvenor Developments for the development of social and market housing on land previously held by the Council at Barton.

Governance arrangements are in place for the companies and partnerships with the Council as shareholder, with a dedicated part of the Finance and Performance Working Group (or the Scrutiny Committee) and feedback taken to the shareholder meetings (SHJVG). The Terms of Reference were updated on 25th June 2025, leading to the creation of two separate groups, one of OCHL and Joint Ventures and one for ODS and ODSTL.

Non-Executive Directors for each company, are appointed against a job description which sought to secure board members with appropriate skill sets for the nature of the particular entity. The Shareholder role is performed by the members of the Cabinet collectively.

The appointment of directors to the board of a company is the responsibility of the shareholder(s). The directors hold a fiduciary duty to their company, but at the same time are also accountable to the shareholder(s), owing duties to both the Council and the company.

Council companies have their own decision-making processes and governance arrangements. The Council Companies are not governed by the Constitution.

Oxford Direct Services Limited and Oxford City Housing Limited benefit from 'Teckal' status allowing them to trade (contract for works, services or supply) with the Council and other Teckal companies wholly within the ownership of the Council, without having to go through a competitive tender process.



18. Statutory Assurances and Controls

The Council's three highest profile statutory roles of head of paid service, chief finance officer (section 151 officer), and monitoring officer together make up the golden triangle.

Together these three distinct legal roles have responsibility in maintaining the Council's corporate health and effectiveness. They also have personal duties under legislation and professional ethical codes in relation to their behaviour and actions. The statutory officers are expected to advise clearly with impartiality and integrity.

Head of Paid Service

The Chief Executive, as the Head of Paid Service, is responsible for the overall corporate and operational management of the Council. These responsibilities have been considered within the context of this Statement and the Chief Executive can confirm that proper arrangements have been put in place for the overall operation and management of the Council.

The Chief Executive has no significant concerns to report and continues to evolve the senior management structure and organisational strategy to align responsibilities and resources to deliver the Council's ambitions and priorities.

S151 Officer

The Chief Finance Officer is responsible for the development and maintenance of the Council's financial, risk, and control framework, which fulfil the requirement of Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 to make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs of the council. In addition the Chief Finance Officer is required to take due regard to the statutory guidance and professional standards published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA).

These responsibilities have been considered within the context of this Statement and the Chief Finance Officer can confirm that the Council's arrangements comply with these standards and statutory responsibilities.

The Council maintains key financial processes throughout the financial year on a cyclical basis, reflecting the financial planning that underpins the Medium Term Financial Strategy, the budget management, control and reporting processes throughout the financial year and then the production of the Council's Statement of Accounts. Each element of this annual financial cycle is undertaken in accordance with statutory guidance, regulations and professional accountancy standards.

These processes and standards are further underpinned by a variety of governance, risk and control mechanisms, for example, internal audit, risk management, the Performance dashboard, the work of the counter-fraud team and the governance boards; including the Development Board, the Change Board, the ODS Strategic Group and the Procurement Board.

Financial controls are monitored and maintained across the Financial Services function by finance business partners, management of the Balance Sheet, cashflow and treasury management, through to debt management and the maintenance and development of the use of the council's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. These roles and functions are informed by the development of relationships and discussions with budget managers throughout the council, ranging from Chief Officers through to cost centre managers.

Other staff in the Financial Services Team ensure there are appropriate controls in place that are adhered to for processes such as procurement, ordering and payment for goods and services, collection of income and the security of assets terms. Assessment of the design of the control framework and the effectiveness of these controls is subject to continuous review by the Council's internal auditors BDO in accordance with the Audit and Governance Committee approved annual internal audit plan. Progress reports from BDO are regularly presented to the Audit and Governance Committee to provide assurance and updates on the implementation of recommendations.

The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy approved by Full Council for 2025 - 2026 in February set a balanced budget for the year as well as the following 3 years. This was accompanied by the Section 25 statement, which provides a formal update on the robustness of estimates, adequacy of reserves and the Chief Finance Officer's advice about risks and commentary in relation to the council's financial affairs in compliance with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003. This statement confirmed that the Council's level of reserves in the opinion of the Section 151 Officer are adequate for the foreseeable future. Budgets remain under review throughout the year with appropriate checks made to ensure that appropriate actions and progress is provided to both senior management and Members.

Risk management updates are provided to both the Corporate Leadership Team and the Audit & Governance Committee throughout the year, which is underpinned by a comprehensive risk management strategy. The corporate risk register is underpinned by service risk registers to provide appropriate, organisation wide assurance.

The draft Statement of Accounts for 2025 - 2026, accompanying this statement, will continue to be disclaimed by the Council's auditors. Ernst & Young (EY) the council's external auditor has estimated that the return to an unmodified opinion is likely to coincide with the audit of the council's final statement of accounts, which will be beneficial for the establishment of the Greater Oxford Council. The annual report provided by EY to the Audit & Governance Committee identified some areas for improvement as part of this journey to an unmodified opinion which are being addressed in line with an action plan that has been shared with the Audit & Governance Committee and will be reviewed and monitored by the Corporate Leadership Team.

In July 2026 the Council's internal auditors, BDO, presented their Internal Audit Annual Report and Statement of Assurance in relation to 2025 - 2026 to the Council's Audit and Governance Committee. In their report the auditor indicated that their opinion was that the systems of internal control were generally satisfactory with some improvements required which was consistent with similar local authorities.

The Counter-Fraud Annual Report was also received by the Audit & Governance Committee in July 2026, which highlighted the success of the 10th annual fraud conference held in November 2025 and that the team had been highly commended via an award for excellence in

protecting the public purse, reflective of the team's success in preventing and/or recovering losses arising from fraud.

Looking forwards to 2026 – 2027 reference has already been made to the action plan implementation in relation to the preparation of the annual statement of accounts. In addition to this further work will be completed to support the awareness and understanding of procurement processes and requirements, which ensure compliance with the Procurement Act 2023 and the associated statutory regulations and guidance, not least via the further roll-out of training to support managers commissioning and procuring services.

Collaborative work is underway in conjunction with Oxford Direct Services (ODS) to develop and enhance the approach to commissioning, costing, compliance and performance management including the assessment of value for money. This follows on from an internal audit review of the governance of these processes and the development and implementation of an associated action plan.

Further developments in the use of Unit4 Agresso, the council's enterprise resource planning system is planned for 2026 – 2027, with a view to improving internal control and ensuring resilience of expenditure approval processes.

There will also be an independent audit review of the Benefits service undertaken by the Department of Work and Pensions, which will review all aspects of the service in accordance with best practice and compliance with national standards.

A review and development of the performance management system is underway, which is intended to develop and improve the timeliness, relevance and reliability of information provided to the Corporate Leadership Team, supporting the links between council priorities and decisions on an evidence base.

The outcome of the Local Government Reorganisation process has now been published by the Government, indicating that the three unitary authority proposal is to be adopted. Preparatory work in conjunction with colleagues from across the county has begun, with a view to ensuring that the transition and implementation of the changes required will ensure that the Greater Oxford Council will be safe and legal on its vesting day on 1st April 2028.

Monitoring Officer

The Monitoring Officer is required to report to the council in any case where it appears that any proposal, decision, or omission by the authority has given rise to or is likely to or would give rise to any contravention of any enactment, rule of law or code of practice or maladministration or injustice in accordance with Sections 5 and 5A of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989; (LGHA 89).

These responsibilities have been considered within the context of this Statement and the Monitoring Officer has no significant concerns to report for the period 2025/2026.

The Monitoring Officer has reported to the Information Commissioners Officer (ICO) on two occasions a data breach, against which no further action has been taken by the ICO. Suggested courses of actions from the ICO together with learning and improvements have been implemented as a consequence of each, within the relevant department and corporately.

Due to the cyber-attack that the Council was victim to in 2025, a report to the ICO was made and, having responded in full to all enquiries raised, the ICO have confirmed no further action will be taken as a result of the referral to them.

The Monitoring Officer also has no significant concerns regarding overall Member conduct. Sixteen complaints were received in the period, 7 upheld (taken to three separate local hearing panels for each Councillor and 4 being resolved by informal resolution) and 9 were dismissed. Training sessions were held during the year for Members of the council and were updated to be more interactive, with positive feedback. Overall, however, there has continued to be a relatively low number of complaints alleging a breach of the Member Code of Conduct during the past year which have all been dealt with in accordance with the Council's adopted procedures for handling such complaints. Given it was an election year the number of complaints remained lower than would be expected.

The Monitoring Officer also considers that the Council has an effective Standards Committee which reviews a regular report at each of their meetings on the progress of the code of conduct complaints. That said the procedures for dealing with standards complaints are in the process of being updated and will be presented to Standards and full Council in the current municipal year for adoption.

The refresh of the governance around the forward plan and report pathways and templates has been positive in terms of improving decision. Measures put in place have ensured that any urgent decisions made are robustly justifiable based on urgency.

The constitution is continually reviewed with regular updates being taken to full Council. Given several changes which require implementation due to the changes in legislation, and in light of LGR, no annual review will be undertaken in the next municipal year, however changes will be brought forward as needed. This has included, in 2025/26, the whistleblowing policy, contract rules and scheme of delegation.

Changes in the Forward Plan were made to ensure that CLT were appraised of all decisions going before committees in advance, due to some difficult items being taken forward in the 2025/26 year. This has worked well and issues are identified and addressed earlier. The continued utilisation of the informal group leaders meeting to brief on papers being brought forward has also been beneficial and improved the decision-making process, which was necessary due to the minority administration of the Council.

Report templates were reviewed and refreshed to ensure that they were capturing all the information required in decision making, including bringing in a link to the Forward Plan and ensuring exempt papers are individually exempted and explained. There has been work undertaken to co-utilise documentation for procurement, to reduce the administrative burden and ensure that both legal and constitutional governance requirements are captured and met.

There has been a significant amount of work through 2025/26 into the current financial year with a review and refining of corporate and service risks, this is leading to better risk management, better informed decision making and more effective oversight of the Council's risks and challenges.

There is work to be done to build upon the success in implementing positive changes at the Council in the coming year, to ensure readiness for LGR, however the Council's processes continue to strengthen and an emphasis on lessons learnt implementation gives assurance that improvements and refinements will continue.

Litigation also continues to be a significant risk factor for the Council, as is seen nationally, there is a marked increase in the use of Judicial Review. The Council has successfully defended Judicial Reviews, and it is a risk that is taken into account by officers in risk registers therefore there is assurance that, as much as is possible, the Council is alive to the risk and impact through its processes and takes steps to mitigate it.

Review of Effectiveness

Overall rating*	Strengths	What needs attention
Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law		
	- Demonstrable consistent implementation and use of the Code of Conduct for members - Code of Conduct training undertaken by councillors post May 2026 elections which increased engagement and participation and was well received. - Parish Councils invited to attend the Code of Conduct training. 6 Independent Persons were appointed in 2025, compared to the previous two. - Procurement Board meet once a month to review new processes and procedures ensuring that best practice is created, challenges, trends and risks are identified and a plan to resolve is agreed. - Strategic Procurement Manager chairs a fortnightly meeting with the Legal team to review performance related to tenders and contracts, resources, timing delays, framework usage, template documents etc.	- Guidance and clarity provided within the organisation on who can seal and sign documents with the introduction of electronic signature solutions due in 2026. - With the amendment to the Council's Contract Rules there is a need to develop a section specifically outlining property and grants rules and these will be removed from the Contract Rules. - The Governance review of OCHL will need to be undertaken now that the company has appointed a new Company Secretary. - A review of the arrangements for dealing with Member Code of Conduct complaints will be carried out in 2026 - Governance Training to be introduced and made mandatory with the introduction of a new e-learning system in 2026. - Governance will be reinforced ahead of the introduction of a section 24 directive from government relating to LGR, which will require in some instances additional approvals from the Shadow Authority. As such the Council's governance needs to be seamless to account for the additional work and potential delays this may introduce.

Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Residents Surveys are now established. • Most Oxford residents remain satisfied with their local area as a place to live (77%), this is a significant increase compared from 2024 (70%) and 2023 (66%), • Residents living in the Central South & West area are the most satisfied (90%). Dissatisfaction is notably higher in Cowley (27%) and South East (25%) compared to the city average. with how the council runs things and how the council keeps residents informed. • Most residents are satisfied with how the Council runs things (60%), how it keeps them informed (63%), and over half feel the Council engages well with them in policy-making and service design (53%). These figures reflect a steady increase in resident satisfaction from 2023 to 2025. • We have engaged public and stakeholders extensively this year in the development of proposals for future unitary councils under local government reorganization. • We have reset our relationship with tenants and leaseholders, co-designing a new Resident Involvement Strategy that supports transparency and accountability of services to residents and the Tenant and Leaseholder Board. • Utilisation of the Council's online Residents' Panel - a group of c1000 residents providing feedback on various topics, including the Council's current work, services, and broader issues. The independently managed panel is broadly representative of the population to ensure diverse voices are heard. The Council is involved in a number of active strategic partnerships working together at all levels – from large anchor institutions to small community groups.
Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Oxford Strategic Partnership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents Survey Top of residents' concerns were housing provision and traffic/transport which falls within the remit of Oxfordshire County Council and some residents had a perception that these are City Council responsibilities • Embedding formal arrangements for tenant involvement in governance of the HRA and Landlord services via the Tenant and Leaseholder Board. • There will be extensive stakeholder and public engagement as plans are progressed towards LGR and vesting day on 1 April 2028. • Positive collaboration with other councils in preparation for LGR including sharing information and data regarding services and communities becoming part of Greater Oxford. This will be overseen collectively by the Chief Executives. • Engagement with communities and Parish Councils joining the Greater Oxford unitary authority including a programme of outreach to revitalise the Council and Parish Council forum • Strengthening the working relationship with Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils to support engagement and collaboration |
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	○ Oxfordshire Joint Leaders Committee (previously Future Oxfordshire Partnership) ○ Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing and Health Improvement Boards ○ Oxfordshire Children's Trust Board ○ Oxford Youth Partnership Board ○ Oxfordshire Strategic Schools Partnership ○ Oxford Localities Forum Meetings ○ Oxford Community Safety Partnership ○ Fast Growth Cities Group ○ Oxford to Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership ○ Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Partnership ○ Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership ○ Oxford Economic Growth Steering Group ○ University and Innovation Partnerships ○ Councillor representation on community groups ○ District Councils Network ○ Local Government Association ○ Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership ○ Oxfordshire Adult Safeguarding Board	
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Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefit		
	• The Council's Strategy sets out objectives and outcomes and outlines the planned work against five priorities: ○ Good, affordable homes ○ Strong, fair economy ○ Thriving Communities ○ Zero Carbon Oxford City Council. ○ Well Run Council • Continuing review and refinement of the existing policy and strategy development toolkit was undertaken and implemented.	• There will be a review and refinement of the role and membership of the Policy Officers group in 2026/2027. • The People Strategy has been reviewed and updated to support the organisation through LGR to support change readiness and manage risks around service disruption to residents. There are three elements to the strategy: preparing managers and employees for change, getting ready to support the formal change and consultation processes leading to the set up of Greater Oxford and supporting system-wide work through the supply of data and updating operational processes and policy ready for the new unitary authority.

	• The Council has a suite of 18 quantifiable corporate key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure delivery of the Council Strategy. • In addition to these corporate KPIs, the Council sets 105 operational KPIs that are reviewed regularly by the Corporate Management Team. Many of these tracking operational metrics are reported as part of regular performance updates to Finance & Performance Scrutiny, the annual Business Plan and the budget process. • The Council's People Strategy 2024 reinforces the corporate aims of putting the citizen at the heart of what we do as an entity. • The Council has voluntarily adopted the Socio-Economic Duty to help: ○ Reduce inequality ○ Promote fairness ○ Enhance inclusive decision making	• Procurement processes support the securing of social value on appropriate procurements, and Match My Project platform is being used to match needs with offers of support.
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Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes		
	• The Council's annual Business Plan sets out publicly its priority work programme activities for the year required to achieve the outcomes set out in the Council Strategy. An annual update report informs of progress that has been made in delivering the Business Plan. • The Council has a strong policy framework with a robust schedule for developing, monitoring, and reporting policies and strategies to the CLT quarterly. Monthly horizon scanning highlights internal, county, and national policy and strategy developments • The Council's senior management structures were restructured in January 2025 to streamline its leadership	• The mobilisation and implementation of work streams to support the smooth transition of services and communities to Graeter Oxford. • Careful planning of leadership and resourcing to minimise disruption to delivery of BAU, service improvements and planned projects.

	team, support greater collaboration, efficiency and help sharpen focus on its strategic direction.	
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Developing the Council's capacity including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it		
	• Clear standards are in place for managers and leaders across the organisation • Management development for 150 managers at all levels has been delivered to build a culture where high performance is both motivated and managed • The annual staff survey measures employee satisfaction with their immediate manager and the leadership of the authority • Opportunities for development through secondment is supported • An aspiring manager programme is designed to develop future leaders and is a positive action initiative to improve the diversity of colleagues in management and leadership roles • The Councillor Induction Programme was updated and expanded to include additional support on key issues affecting the Councillor role, as well as providing clarification on the expected standards of behaviour of councillors. Parish Councillors were invited to the training. • Our People Strategy was refreshed in 2024 and takes into account the current challenges facing the Council, and sets objectives designed to build a high performing organisation that meets the needs of the community it serves. The People Strategy also aims to support the Council's planned work against its five priorities.	• Following the Senior Management Restructure further leadership development work with CLT and senior managers will take place to support greater delegation of operational decision making and create opportunities for progression. • Leading through change will need to be a focus of leadership development to ensure we are prepared for LGR and that staff are in the best possible position to benefit from opportunities that arise. • Introductory workshops for new managers will be implemented, with an opportunity for existing managers to attend for a refresh • A review is ongoing of councillor development and training non-mandatory. This will focus on providing councillors with the training needed to undertake their role and targeted where required particularly in relation to regulatory, corporate, wellbeing and safety priorities. It will also focus on encouraging engagement with sessions by councillors. Specific sessions for councillors in positions of meeting chairs will be held to ensure consistency and development of chairing skills. • Inviting Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils to attend councillor training along with Parish Councillors

	Mandatory training for Councillors reviewed and refreshed, with format of delivery being reviewed	
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Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

	- A balanced four-year medium term financial plan with robust scrutiny from Corporate Leadership Team and Scrutiny members - Regular financial reporting to CLT and Members - Regular risk monitoring, supported by a Risk Management Group and reporting of risks to Corporate Leadership Team and Cabinet - Oversight of the financial performance of companies and regular catch up with Company Finance Directors - Independent commentary by Statutory Officers on reports from Companies and joint entities presented to shareholders - Operational and corporate KPIs dashboard regularly reviewed by CMT - Regular review by Audit and Governance Committee of internal audit reports and the implementation of recommendations - Moderate internal audit assurance opinion from internal auditors i.e. no major weaknesses in the internal control systems - Compliance with the Government backstop dates for the presentation of audit opinions on the Statement of Accounts and this Annual Governance Statement alongside that - The Corporate Leadership team undertook a piece of work to fundamentally review our corporate risk register to ensure it is strategic and cross-cutting. Some which were considered to be service related measures were placed in service risk registers and KPIs were reviewed and updated.	- There will be continued adherence to policies and procedures in order to ensure good financial management and internal control across the authority. - Review and refresh of cost centre management guidance and training including the use of key financial systems - Review of Corporate Credit Card use and embed approval process in organisation. - The Corporate Dashboard will be refreshed to improve CLT oversight of performance, risk and escalation.
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- All ICT security policies and standards are revised and reissued annually; the latest revision was completed in June 2026 and published to the Cyber Incident Response Team SharePoint site,

Implementing good practices in transparency reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislative requirements for meeting papers adhered to for all committees • Clear policies on access to information for members • FOIA and DSAR response times remain consistently within the statutory limits • Good practice in publishing officer / delegated decisions, with all delegated decisions being published correctly and any key decisions being added to the Forward Plan in good time with an improvement in the year on reduction in urgent decisions which were avoidable. • Disclosure log now in place and updated with FOIA releases • Forward plan now included SHJVG matters • Scrutiny by members to ensure management are held to account to its electorate for the financial stewardship of funds and operation of processes. This includes a monthly committee and three specialised working groups to provide scrutiny of three strategic areas for the Council • Implemented processes and templates to ensure that the exemption of documents from published decision making is properly done and justified. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work is continuing to review and publish internally departmental schemes of delegation • Earlier engagement of wide-reaching reports to the Scrutiny Committee to be reviewed to ensure more focussed and engaged feedback and any amendments can be included before submission to Cabinet or Council. • Add to the forward plan decisions to be taken at Audit and Governance and Licensing Committees to ensure senior leadership has oversight of decisions and relevant matters • Review the access to information policy for members • Seek to appoint and coopt Independent Members to the Audit Committee in line with best practice |
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	There are sound policies and processes in place which are working across services that provide for good governance arrangements and support compliance with the requirements of this principle and the achievement of the Council's aims and objectives. There may be minor areas for continuous improvement, but these do not represent a significant or material risk to the Council's overall governance framework.
	Whilst there are policies and processes in place, there are some areas which remain a challenge for the council or require further improvement, which may impact the effectiveness of elements of the Council's Governance Arrangements, compliance with this principle and achievement of the council's aims and objectives. The Council has in place an action plan to address challenges and improvement matters
	The Council has significant challenges in relation to the policies and processes which may impact the effectiveness of elements of the council's Governance Arrangements, compliance with this principle and achievement of the Council's aims and objectives. We have implemented plans for corrective actions to manage these risks

Action Plan 2025/26

Action to be taken	Lead Officer	Reporting / Monitoring
All Service Areas	Lead Officer	Reporting / Monitoring
Each Service Area to develop and publish on the intranet their own scheme of delegation for powers flowing to them from Cabinet and/or Council	Each Service Director	Cabinet / CLT & A&G
Each Service Area to implement LGR	Each Service Director	Cabinet / CLT & A&G
Each Service Area to ensure good communication with Council members and Council officers to support proactive engagement with LGR	Each Service Director	Cabinet / CLT & A&G
Review policies in line with the Corporate Policy timetable as they are required	Each Director	CLT / Cabinet as required
Review of the governance documents and arrangements for OCHL group	Emma Jackman	SHJVG / CLT
Each Service Area to ensure that it meets the Council's responsibilities under incoming legislative changes, including the: - Public Sector Equality Duty - the Armed Services Bill when enacted - the new EHRC guidance - Best Value Duty	Each Service Director	Cabinet / CMT & A&G
Cyber Security	Lead Officer	Reporting / Monitoring
To reach 90% completion of mandatory cyber security	Rocco Labellarte & People Team	CLT
Continue to build capability for adoption of new technology, particularly Artificial Intelligence, and business transformation to drive efficiency and effectiveness	Rocco Labellarte	CMT
To run further Phishing simulations as appropriate	Rocco Labellarte	Cabinet & CLT
To review and update ICT policies annually	Rocco Labellarte	CLT
Information Governance	Lead Officer	Reporting / Monitoring
To reach 90% completion of mandatory information governance training	Grace Wigham	CLT

To complete annual review of retention of files to monitor and review compliance with updated policy	Grace Wigham	CLT
Housing	Lead Officer	Reporting / Monitoring
Deliver a plan to support the new competency and conduct standard for Social Housing being introduced in October 2026. (covered below by Nerys?)	Nerys Parry	Cabinet/ CLT
Continuing to implement our comprehensive action plans for transforming the organisation, operation and governance of all aspects of our housing services, controlling and driving down our temporary accommodation, as well as ensuring compliance with the Consumer Standards and Social Housing Act in our role as a social housing landlord	Nerys Parry	Cabinet / CLT
Procurement	Lead Officer	Reporting / Monitoring
Maintaining the register of contracts and pipeline of contracts and continuing with Business as Usual.	Annette Osborne	CLT
Publication of the 1st Section 70 Notice (Payments made above £30,000 attributed to a public contract) to be finalised in July and then published quarterly thereafter.	Annette Osborne	CLT
People Team	Lead Officer	Reporting / Monitoring
Prepare for compliance with the new Employment Rights Bill	Gail Malkin	CLT
Prepare the organisation for LGR through individual development, resource management challenges and preparedness for change.	Gail Malkin	CLT
Implement the 2024 to 2026 revised People Strategy	Gail Malkin	CLT
Corporate Complaints		
BDO to undertake a review of all Council complaints processes		
To implement any improvements recommended following the BDO audit		
Law, Governance & Strategy/ Monitoring Officer	Lead Officer	Reporting / Monitoring
Review of arrangements for dealing with Code of Conduct complaints	Emma Jackman	Standards Committee

Develop a section specifically outlining property and grants rules	Emma Jackman	Council / CLT
To review and establish improved engagement with City & Parish Councils Forum	Emma Jackman	Standards Committee
To reinforce and clarify internal governance and dovetail it with LGR requirements for Shadow Authority sign off post a section 24 direction being issued by government.	Emma Jackman	CLT
To complete the review of existing policy and strategy development toolkit by August 2026	Lucy Cherry	CLT
Finances/ s151 Officer		
Complete the refresh of the Service KPI reporting and process	Alistair Rush	CLT