



Annual Governance Statement

2023-2024

Basildon Borough Council

Basildon Centre

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Basildon

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We want Basildon to be home to healthy and active local communities able to support themselves and each other; offer a high quality of life for all residents through attractive, liveable, accessible and safe homes, neighbourhoods and towns along with the provision of enduring facilities, green spaces and town centres that meet the needs of the community; and have a thriving, dynamic and diverse economy where all our communities benefit from increased opportunity and our workforce has the right skills for our local economy and beyond.

These ambitions are set out in the council's Corporate Plan 2024-28 that describes how the council will meet the challenges ahead and make the most of opportunities.

To be successful the council must have a solid foundation of good governance and sound financial management. Basildon's Local Code of Corporate Governance ensures that we are doing the right things, in the right way, in line with our values. The Local Code is supported by an Assurance Framework that sets out how and what the council will seek to obtain assurance on.

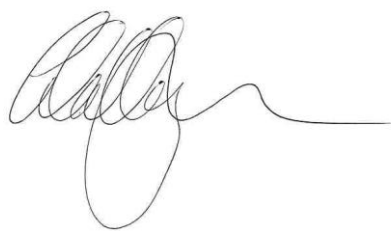
A copy of the council's Local Code and Assurance Framework is available on our website at <http://www.basildon.gov.uk/governance>.

Each year the council is required to produce an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) which describes how its corporate governance arrangements set out in the Local Code have been working. This Statement gives assurances on compliance for the year ending 31 March 2024.

The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive both recognise the importance of having a solid foundation of good governance and sound financial management. They pledge their commitment to address the matters highlighted in this Statement, and to further enhance our governance arrangements to enable delivery of our Corporate Plan.

The Leader and Chief Executive confirm they have been advised of the implications of the review by Senior Management and the Audit & Risk Committee and are satisfied that the steps outlined in this document will ensure that our governance arrangements remain fit for the future.

Signed on behalf of Basildon Borough Council.



Leader of the Council

Date: 18.07.2024



Interim Chief Executive

Date: 18.07.24

REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COUNCIL'S GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Throughout the year, the council regularly reviews the effectiveness of its governance framework to streamline and improve our processes to ensure these arrangements remain effective, now and into the future. This is informed by individual service leadership and management, corporate oversight functions (including statutory officers), internal audit, external audit, and other review agencies. In reviewing the effectiveness of the council's governance framework, the commitments detailed within Appendix A of the Local Code are assessed.

Similar and proportionate oversight and governance arrangements should also be put in place in respect of services outsourced to external suppliers, trading partnerships, shared service arrangements and arm's length bodies.

The Annual Governance Statement incorporates the continuous review of the effectiveness of our governance arrangements throughout 2023/24. It identifies those areas where we can and will do more to ensure that we have effective governance arrangements that enable the organisation to deliver on its commitment to creating a borough with healthy and active local communities, a high quality of life for all residents, and have a thriving, dynamic and diverse economy.

This statement is an objective appraisal of our governance framework and shows that we have **adequate**¹ arrangements which continue to be regarded as fit for purpose and comply with the council's Local Code of Corporate Governance. It shows that we have met our legal and statutory obligations to our residents. While the council has good foundations in relation to its governance arrangements, the council recognises that further work is required to continue to embed and strengthen its governance culture. It also acknowledges that due to the complex and dynamic environment in which it operates, the governance arrangements will need to continually evolve to respond to changing circumstances.

The substantial back log of local authority audits is well documented. For this council, the 2020/21 audit remains uncompleted though the auditors have suggested that matters should be resolved by 31 May 2024. No audit work has been completed on the 2021/22 or 2022/23 accounts both of which were published in draft by the prescribed deadline. On the 8 February 2024, the Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities issued a consultation titled 'Addressing the local audit backlog in England'. The consultation seeks views on amending the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 as part of a package of cross-system measures to clear the backlog and put the system on a sustainable footing. The consultation proposes a back stop date of 30 September 2024 for all accounts up to 2022/23 to be signed off. This will inevitably result in disclaimed or qualified opinions. The impact of this on the council's position is not yet clear. The 2023/24 accounts will be audited by our newly appointed auditors, EY. A timeline for the audit has yet to be established.

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 policies, aims and objectives and can, therefore, only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.

The council recognises that there are areas where we wish to enhance our arrangements to ensure that we continue to do the right things, in the right way, in line with our values and to consider significant challenges we face.

¹ There are areas for improvement, but most key controls are in place and are operating effectively. Adequate assurance can be given that the system, process, or activity should achieve its objectives.

The council is facing new economic challenges that could also affect its financial position such as, but not limited to, historically high inflation, interest rates and energy costs, increasing demand on services, insurance claims, planning appeals, appeals against housing/homeless decisions, business rates appeals, enforcement and uncertainties over central government funding.

Compliance with CIPFA Financial Management Code

CIPFA published the first edition of their 'Financial Management Code' for local authorities in October 2019. CIPFA considers that compliance with this code is mandatory for all local authorities, but it is important to note that such compliance is not specifically mandated by statute.

The code is essentially a best practice guide to financial management in the local authority sector. It covers the following areas:

- The responsibilities of the chief financial officer and the leadership team (including members)
- Governance and financial management style
- Medium to long term financial management
- The annual budget
- Stakeholder engagement and business plans
- Monitoring financial performance
- External financial reporting

Officers have undertaken an assessment of the extent of compliance with the requirements of the code. In general terms the council's arrangements follow the recommended best practice.

Subsidiary Companies

The council has three companies (Sempra Homes Ltd, Acorn House Developments (Basildon) Ltd, and Basildon Borough Enterprises Ltd) which were set up to deliver opportunities for the council, specifically relating to building and providing quality homes for local people. Acorn House Developments (Basildon) Ltd is no longer an operational company and officers are in the process of winding the company up; the company is anticipated to be dissolved in 2024/25 unless it is utilised for another purpose. BBE Ltd is a holding company and holds all the shares in the other companies.

Governance arrangements for all companies have been put in place and were recently revised. The council has approved and monitors the business plans. Regular update reports are submitted to appropriate Committees. All Company Directors are either Elected Members or officers of the council and have all received appropriate training.

Statutory Assurances

Whilst a number of assurances have been obtained to support the conclusion that the council's governance arrangements are adequate, it is important that the following specific assurances are considered to support this Statement:

1. Head of Paid Service

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 Head of Paid Service can confirm that proper arrangements have been put in place for the overall operation and management of the council.

Over the last year a great deal of work has been undertaken to modernise our services and infrastructure. For instance, we recently launched the biggest changes to our waste services in decades,

and we are completely overhauling our network and technical capabilities to improve how we work. We are resetting the organisation, and it is important we have the right leadership team in place to take us forward.

In February, Full Council approved proposals for a restructure of the council's senior management team. The new Corporate Leadership structure became effective on the 1st of April 2024 and has led to a number of our senior colleagues moving into new roles, while others have already or will leave the council in the near future. There will also be a recruitment exercise in the coming months to fill any vacant positions.

The Head of Paid Service can provide assurance that this does not affect the day-to-day running of our services. The council will continue to operate as we do now. We are a good performing council, and these changes are about building on that strength and success.

We face a number of challenges in local government. Increasing demand on our services, a challenging financial outlook and uncertainty in national politics. The Head of Paid Service is confident that the council is positioning itself to take on those challenges by taking these necessary steps.

2. Chief Financial, Section 151 Officer

The Chief Finance Officer is responsible for making arrangements for the development and maintenance of the council's governance, risk, and control framework, ensuring lawfulness and financial prudence of decision making and the administration of financial affairs, in accordance with Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972. These responsibilities have been considered within the context of this Statement and the Chief Finance Officer can confirm that the council's arrangements conform to Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 and that the council complies with the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) in Local Government (2016).

While the council has robust financial management arrangements in place it is important to note that the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) identifies resource shortfalls of £1.7 million in 2025/26, £1.9 million in 2026/27 and £5.5 million in 2027/28. The council is continuing to develop the MTFS and strengthen the alignment with the Corporate Plan outcomes, while addressing the budget gap and reducing risk. The budget approach will focus on addressing efficiency targets and delivering additional income through a combination of:

- building accurate service budgets;
- identifying and delivering savings initiatives;
- investing in services where possible, providing there are demonstrable returns or clear social benefits to residents.

These are underpinned by key corporate programmes including the organisational, waste, customer, and commercial strategies.

It should be noted that the medium-term funding for local government and consequently this authority, remains unclear given the single year financial settlement for 2024/25. Any wider local government funding review undertaken by the Government is not anticipated to take effect until after the next general election. The council continues to be exposed to significant financial risk with regard to utility costs, interest rates and high levels of wider inflationary pressure. There are also significant service demand pressures, particularly regarding Homelessness. Provision has been made to manage these as far as possible, but they remain an area of concern.

3. 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). The Monitoring Officer is also responsible for matters relating to the conduct and is responsible for the operation of the council's constitution.

These responsibilities have been considered within the context of this statement and the Monitoring Officer has no significant concerns to report. The Monitoring Officer did formally report to the council as required, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's annual letter and the Housing Ombudsman Annual Report identifying instances of service failure/maladministration arising from complaints they had investigated.

The council has adopted the new Model Member Code of Conduct developed by the Local Government Association which has also been adopted by all local councils in the borough. Training has been provided and will continue to be provided annually to ensure there remains good awareness of the requirements of the Code of Conduct and to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. The Monitoring Officer has no significant concerns regarding overall Member conduct and 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.

The Monitoring Officer also considers that the council has an effective Joint Standards Committee in place that continues to report to Full Council annually on the work they have undertaken during the year and provide council with assurance.

4. Chief Audit Executive

In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (as amended) and the Public Sector Internal Auditing Standards (PSIAS), the Audit & Counter Fraud Manager, who is the Chief Audit Executive for the council is required to provide independent assurance and opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the councils' risk management and control framework, and through the internal audit service deliver an annual programme of risk based audit activity, including counter fraud and investigation activity and make recommendations for the improvement of the management of risk and control.

The original audit plan for 2023/24 has not been fully delivered, owing to a number of deferred items. Audit reviews have had to be re-scheduled as result of IT developments, resourcing issues within service departments and delays in taking forward new council strategies identified for subsequent audit review.




The Chief Audit Executive is satisfied however, that sufficient work has been undertaken to draw a reasonable conclusion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the council's arrangements. Based on the work performed during 2023/24 and other sources of assurance the Chief Audit Executive is of the opinion that adequate assurance can be taken that the council's risk management, internal control, and governance processes, in operation during the year to 31 March 2024, generally accord with proper practice and are fundamentally sound, although there are opportunities to improve the arrangements to enhance the council's governance framework. Concerns were raised with respect to the council's use of volunteers, the claiming of expenses and treatment of certain payroll deductions, which have or are being addressed. We have examined performance and project management in the context of corporate plan delivery, and whilst guidance and tools have been put in place to facilitate these processes, they are still to be fully embedded, and clarity needs to be strengthened around the role of thematic boards for the processes to fully support the achievement of the council's strategic aims.


The council has in place detailed improvement and development plans for the areas where we can and will do more to ensure that our arrangements remain fit for purpose. Although progress has been made regarding this, there are still a number of areas where agreed actions are yet to be fully addressed and

embedded. Full details of the assurance provided in this Statement can be found within the Internal Audit Annual Report for 2023/24.

Under the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 (as amended) and the PSIAS, the council is required to undertake a review of the effectiveness of its Internal Audit function and to report the results in the Annual Governance Statement. An independent review was undertaken in January 2022 which has reinforced our opinion that the council has effective arrangements in place for the provision of the Internal Audit Service and is fully compliant with the PSIAS.


RATIONALE FOR 'ADEQUATE ASSURANCE' OPINION


Definition	Description
<p>Adequate</p> 	<p>There are sound policies and processes in place, which are working effectively across services that provide for good governance arrangements and support compliance with requirements of this Principle and the achievement of the councils' aims and objectives.</p> <p>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.</p>
<p>Some development or areas for improvement</p> 	<p>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.</p>
<p>Key development or many areas for improvement</p> 	<p>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.</p>


What's working well and how can we improve				
Core Principles of the Framework	Overall Assessment	Strengths		Challenges
Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles and responsibilities are set out for delivering council services and holding the council to account. There are defined roles throughout the organisation, with a clear structure from Chief Executive down, including the Corporate Leadership Team and Heads of Service/Managers. • The council has defined its corporate, statutory, and mandatory development areas and has up to date eLearning programmes available for staff to access. • The council has a detailed constitution covering the powers of committees, members and senior officers, statutory officers, and decision-making processes. • Legal framework (constitution, policy & procedures) that effectively sets out the rules and procedures to be followed by members and officers, including Gifts and Hospitality, and Declarations of Interests. • The council's arrangements for member induction and training are appropriate to support members in effectively executing their duties and help ensure robust decision-making. • The council ensures that its values are embedded within council policies and procedures, and that there is an expectation that those who work with the council will respect these. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following the senior management restructure and corporate reset of the organisation, the focus of "The Role of the Manager" will be a priority for 2024. 	


What's working well and how can we improve				
Core Principles of the Framework	Overall Assessment			
		Strengths		Challenges
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council maintains a policy framework to ensure effective delivery of the council's objectives. • Effective ethical framework built on the Seven Principles of Public Life that set out the standards of behaviour, conduct and values the council expects of its members, officers and those who work with the council. • Effective whistleblowing policies and procedures. • The council has effective complaint handling procedures and processes which have been enhanced through centralising the management of cases to ensure consistency. • Procurement arrangements to demonstrate good practice, compliance with legislation, realise social value, value for money and public accountability are in place. • Company structures and governance arrangements are in place for council wholly owned companies. 		

What's working well and how can we improve				
Core Principles of the Framework	Overall Assessment	Strengths		
		Challenges		
Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council has a partnership framework to support formation and operation where partnership arrangements are considered necessary to help the council deliver its corporate ambitions. The council has a detailed constitution covering the powers of committees, members and senior officers, statutory officers, and decision-making processes. The council has a Consultation and Engagement Policy in place and adequately consults with its residents and stakeholders. Effectively recognises and values the diversity of our communities and workforce, supported by an Inclusion and Diversity Policy and Strategy. Webcasting of meetings and effectively recording decisions made through Committees and publish those appropriately. 		
Principle C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council regularly reviews its performance management framework to ensure it remains fit for purpose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following the withdrawal of the last emerging plan in March 2022, the council do not have an emerging plan under the current planning system. Following an intervention letter from Secretary of State in 	

What's working well and how can we improve				
Core Principles of the Framework	Overall Assessment			
		Strengths		Challenges
economic, social, and environmental benefit			Dec 2023 the Local Development Scheme has been reviewed and now evidence shows that the council can submit a new plan to the Planning Inspectorate for examination by June 2025. This meets the deadline set for all Local Planning Authorities. It is anticipated that subject to the examination in public running smoothly that the plan will be adopted in late 2026.	
Principle D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An approved Corporate Plan setting the priorities, values, and strategic direction of the council. The corporate plan is now subject to annual review. • The council regularly reviews its performance management framework to ensure it remains fit for purpose. • Alignment of strategic planning and the budget setting process has advanced significantly. Service budgets were organised and presented in the corporate plan themes, giving members and the community greater 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following the recent Senior Management Restructure which became effective on the 1st of April 2024, the priority is to ensure stability at a senior level and for the new administration to review the Corporate Plan and business as usual activities. A transition plan to launch the new structure is being developed which will include interim arrangements pending 	

What's working well and how can we improve				
Core Principles of the Framework	Overall Assessment			
		Strengths	Challenges	
		transparency over the link between resources and the achievement of the council's priorities.	recruitment to vacant posts, and the new ways of working. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Further work is required to review the strategic approach to monitor, measure and review the council's performance.	
Principle E. Developing the entity's capacity including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Roles and responsibilities are set out for delivering council services and holding the council to account. There are defined roles throughout the organisation, with a clear structure from Chief Executive down, including the Corporate Leadership Team and Heads of Service/Managers.Alignment of strategic planning and the budget setting process has advanced significantly. Service budgets were organised and presented in the corporate plan themes, giving members and the community greater transparency over the link between resources and the achievement of the council's priorities.The council has further strengthened its security systems and technology to support delivery of services and support members and officers in performing their roles.The council regularly reviews the approach to individual performance management to ensure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Following the approval of the Asset Management Policy in December 2022 and the Corporate Asset Management Strategy and HRA Asset Management Strategy in 2023 Asset Management action plans have now been created to drive forward these strategies into tangible change and the use of data will be key to modernising the service and mitigating the risks. The strategy's implementation will span five years, with annual reviews to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness in achieving its objectives.	

What's working well and how can we improve				
Core Principles of the Framework	Overall Assessment	Strengths		
				Challenges
		<p>consistency in holding staff to account for their performance and behaviour.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council has an approved Workforce Strategy that ensures that the council recruits and retains staff, develops skills, and ensures those skills are deployed effectively to improve resilience across the organisation. The council has an approved Organisational Strategy which ensures the organisation is fit for the future to deliver its ambitions. 		
Principle F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective system of internal audit delivered in line with the Public Sector Internal Auditing Standards. Effective business continuity/emergency planning processes in place to continue to provide services and respond to an emergency or event. The council has effective Risk Management arrangements in place which is working well across the organisation. Effective counter fraud and corruption arrangements and whistleblowing policies and procedures. Effective health and safety management framework which seeks to ensure compliance with the law. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council has made significant progress to develop the building blocks for effective information governance. However, further work is required to embed these across the council. A significant amount of work has been undertaken to define the council's approach to project and programme management. However, there is still work required to agree clear project 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively promotes safeguarding to prevent harm and reduce the risk of abuse or neglect. • The council has robust financial management arrangements in place however, it is important to note that the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) identifies resource shortfalls. The council's Corporate Programme outlines plans to manage this deficit through a combination of service efficiencies, process reviews, digital transformation, creating new income streams and delivery of a commercial programme. • The council has defined its approach to project and programme management. The Programme Assurance Office promotes the use of the project management toolkits and methodology as part of induction and regular engagement sessions with Directors and lead officers. • The council regularly reviews its performance management framework to ensure it remains fit for purpose. 	<p>gateways and decision points within the Council's Project and Programme Management Framework, aligned to the corporate leadership meeting arrangements to enable well informed decisions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further work is required to review the strategic approach to monitor, measure and review the council's performance. 	
<p>Principle G.</p> <p>Implementing good practices in transparency reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective Audit & Risk Committee that provides a source of assurance and complies with guidance. • The council demonstrates its commitment to openness by producing an annual report covering the performance of the council, value for money and stewardship of resources. • Effective arrangements in place to produce the Annual Governance Statement, with Local Code of Corporate Governance and Combined Assurance Framework reviewed and updated annually. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further work is required to review the strategic approach to monitor, measure and review the council's performance. • The substantial back log of local authority audits is well documented. For this council, the 2020/21 audit remains uncompleted, and no audit work has been completed on the 2021/22 or 2022/23 accounts both of which were published in 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The council's shared service arrangements are appropriately governed to ensure accountability in terms of achieving outcomes and managing risks.• The council's webcasting of meetings attracts good numbers of viewers and increases public scrutiny.• The council has reviewed and updated its Publication Scheme to provide transparency in access to information.	<p>draft by the prescribed deadline. On the 8 February 2024, the Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities issued a consultation which proposes a back stop date of 30 September 2024 for all accounts up to 2022/23 to be signed off. The impact of this on the council's position is not yet clear.</p>	
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PROGRESS ON ADDRESSING GOVERNANCE IMPROVEMENT AREAS FROM 2023/24

What we said we would do	Progress
Decision Making and Evidence and Delegations of Duties - To further develop alignment of strategic planning and the budget setting process by ensuring the corporate plan and the key desired outcomes and deliverables arising from this and the budget setting process and allocation of resources are reviewed concurrently with clearer alignment.	<p>The council's Corporate Plan is the principal corporate strategy for the council. It recognises the primary role of the council is to deliver good quality services in the borough. It is also an expression of the council's wider ambitions and priorities for the borough. These ambitions, which are underpinned by a range of outcomes, set the context for the allocation of resources in the council's budget and medium-term financial strategy (MTFS). At the same time, the council's budget and MTFS sets out the projected financial operating environment for the council. As such, both the priority setting process and budget setting process are inextricably linked, with each needing to be aware of the opportunities and limitations of one another.</p> <p>The process of aligning these two strategies has advanced significantly during the year. This has included their joint development and consideration as part of the strategic planning process. A joint report was considered by the Scrutiny Commission, Cabinet and then at Council on 22 February 2024, resulting in the approval of the revised corporate plan, council tax and rents. As part of this, the service budgets were organised and presented in the corporate plan themes, giving members and the community greater transparency over the link between resources and the achievement of the council's priorities.</p>
Roles and Responsibilities - To set out and embed the specific tasks, responsibilities and behaviours relating to the role of the manager.	<p>The focus on the Role of the Manager was suspended after successfully delivering four cohorts of the Management Development Programme for middle managers.</p> <p>Following the senior management restructure and the corporate reset of the organisation, meetings were held with the Chief Executive to understand the products that are going to be developed as part of the Role of the Manager.</p> <p>As such, this area remains a key action for 2024/25.</p>
Effective Information Governance - To further embed the importance and value of information governance across the organisation and to address areas that still need improvement.	<p>Embedding the importance and value of information governance across the organisation is an ongoing commitment which requires keeping abreast of new legislation both at national and international levels. We are committed to continuous learning and keeping our eyes out for what is new, what has changed, in order to adopt and implement relevant changes across the organisation where necessary. Significant improvements have been made during 2023/24. These included: The sign off and implementation of Data Protection and Information Governance toolkit for staff and members. The approval and endorsement of BBC Appropriate Policy Document for the</p>

What we said we would do	Progress
	<p>processing of sensitive and criminal offence data. The procurement of a system to register all processing activities of personal information (RoPA). Successful pilot of document sensitivity and retention labels on SharePoint within the Finance Department. Work is ongoing with reviewing, sorting, and clearing all paper documents stored in different parts of BBC locations and sorting out permanent storage/disposal solutions. Our focus for 2024/25 will be to roll out the implementation of sensitivity and retention labels on SharePoint across the wider team. Continue to progress our effort to simplify the processes associated with compliance across the board via our dedicated Information Asset Owners through training and awareness sessions.</p> <p>As such, this area remains a key action for 2024/25.</p>
<p>Asset Management - To undertake an Asset review in order that the council can consider the services it delivers and those that it may wish to deliver (and can afford to deliver) in the future to ensure that the appropriate property, staff, and finance are available to deliver that service for the period required. A key part of the review of property assets is to ensure that a clear contribution to the vision and aims of the council can be identified, including climate ambitions.</p>	<p>There have been significant changes to our legal obligations in regards to Asset Management including energy efficiency of buildings and creating a carbon neutral estate by 2030. The Civica Keystone Asset Management system is coming to the end of its life and will be replaced in 2024 which provides an opportunity to modernise our Asset Management data strategy and drive significant efficiencies as our current operating models are outdated and we need to amalgamate all data into a single system.</p> <p>The Asset Management Policy was approved by Cabinet in December 2022 and the Corporate Asset Management Strategy and HRA Asset Management Strategy were approved by Cabinet in 2023. Asset Management action plans have now been created to drive forward these strategies into tangible change and the use of data will be key to modernising the service and mitigating the risks. We have begun retrofitting homes under the SHDF grant and will continue to do so over the 12 months.</p> <p>The strategy's implementation will span five years, with annual reviews to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness in achieving its objectives.</p> <p>As such, this remains a key action for 2024/25.</p>
<p>Local Plan - To prepare an up to date plan to provide a positive vision for the future of the borough; a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social, and environmental (Including biodiversity) priorities; and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings.</p>	<p>Following the withdrawal of the last emerging plan in March 2022, the council do not have an emerging plan under the current planning system. An initial Local Development Scheme (LDS) timetable was agreed in November 2022. Following an intervention letter from Secretary of State in December 2023 this LDS has been reviewed and now evidence shows that the council can submit a new plan to the Planning Inspectorate for examination by June 2025. The new LDS has been agreed and meets the deadline set for all Local Planning Authorities. It is anticipated that subject to the examination in public running smoothly that the plan will be adopted in late 2026.</p> <p>Since the withdrawal of the local plan in March 2022 the following work has been completed:</p>

What we said we would do	Progress
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared a new Local Development Scheme (LDS) which has been approved by Full Council. • Prepared a Regulation 18: Issues and Options consultation documents within the timeframe set out in the LDS (Q2 2023). • Held a 12-week Regulation 18: Issues and Options Consultation, which commenced within the timeframe set out in the LDS (Q2 2023). • Completed analysis of the Regulation 18: Issues and Options Consultation. This will be scrutinised by committee on 1 February 2024 and reviewed by Cabinet on 12 March 2024. • Held a 'Call for sites' and are currently interrogating the methodology for site selection. • Commenced the preparation of a new evidence base including retail and leisure needs, employment land, green belt review, playing pitch and facilities strategy, Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment, Settlement Hierarchy, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, Urban Capacity Study, Climate change and Biodiversity issues. These are all ongoing projects and are expected to be completed by Autumn 2024. • Commissioned an Integrated Impact Assessment, comprising Sustainability Appraisal and incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Equalities Impact Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment. • Held regular joint working meetings with Essex planning officers (EPOA), JOG (South Essex officers which is part of South Essex Councils) and Duty to Cooperate (quarterly) with neighbouring authorities which are all supported by meeting notes / minutes. • Encouraged local community discussions including implementing a new digital approach to engagement. <p>As such, this area remains a key action for 2024/25.</p>
Performance Management - To establish a regular and rigorous system of data collection and usage to provide a comprehensive picture of the council's progress towards achieving its performance targets/goals and provide early indication of emerging issues/pressures that may require remedial action.	<p>Following the approval of the performance management framework by Policy Executive and Full Council in July 2021, the service has continued to embed the framework across the organisation to enable members, corporate leadership team, and managers to challenge underperformance, monitor delivery of the corporate programme and service plans, improve decision making and allow us to report our performance publicly. Further work is required to establish a regular and rigorous system of data collection and usage to provide a comprehensive picture of the council's progress towards achieving its performance targets/goals and provide early indication of emerging issues/pressures that may require remedial action.</p> <p>As such, this area remains a key action for 2024/25.</p>
Programme and Project Management - To implement and embed the governance	<p>A range of activities were delivered to improve the council's project and programme management culture. A total of 90 officers completed the project and programme management tailored training in 2023/24. A tailored sponsorship package is being developed</p>

What we said we would do	Progress
<p>arrangements to ensure projects are being run in accordance with all necessary processes and procedures.</p>	<p>and will include both framework awareness sessions for the Corporate Leadership Team and will also focus on their role and responsibility in terms of project/programme and portfolio sponsorship capacity. It expected this will be rolled out in 2024/25.</p> <p>The Programme Assurance Office are also in the process of completing the review of the Project Management Framework to, not only, align to the policy and strategy development process but ensure key service requirements such as risk; governance; finance; procurement and legal are considered within the framework. This will inform the updated tools and templates that are being revised.</p> <p>Proposals for a refocused Community of Practice have been developed and the intention is to strengthen the existing 'Critical Friend' cohort who will help embed the understanding of the project governance framework and associated tools across all services.</p> <p>Further work to maintain and populate the key milestones for each of the projects and programmes within the Corporate Plan will be ongoing through the dedicated Programme Assurance Office.</p> <p>As such, this area remains a key action for 2024/25.</p>

ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS THE AMBER GOVERNANCE AREAS IDENTIFIED ABOVE AS PART OF THE 2023/24 ANNUAL REVIEW

Governance Area	Activity Description	Target Due Date	Responsible Officer(s)
Senior Management Restructure	To deliver a transition plan to launch the new senior management restructure which will include interim arrangements pending recruitment to vacant posts, and the new ways of working.	31 March 2025	Chief Executive Officer; Strategic Director Resources and Governance; Assistant Director Workforce and Change.
Roles and Responsibilities	To provide clarity on the Corporate Leadership Team, Heads of Service, and Managers roles, and expected behaviours to be displayed at each level of management within the council.	31 March 2025	Strategic Director Resources and Governance; Assistant Director Workforce and Change.
Effective Information Governance	To further embed the importance and value of information governance across the organisation by adopting and implementing relevant changes across the organisation where necessary, and to continue to progress our effort to simplify the processes associated with compliance across the board via our dedicated Information Asset Owners through training and awareness sessions.	31 March 2025	Strategic Director Resources and Governance; Assistant Director Legal and Democracy.
Asset Management	To deliver the key principles outlined in the Asset Management Policy to manage the council's housing, land, and buildings, over the next 5 years (monitored and reviewed annually to ensure it is still relevant to what it is trying to achieve).	31 March 2028	Strategic Director Housing, Property and Community Safety; Assistant Director Property, Assets and Development
	To assess whether the capacity of the council, following the reassessment of the director structure, is sufficient to deliver the changing priorities from new administration.	31 March 2025	
Local Plan	To prepare an up to date plan to provide a positive vision for the future of the borough; a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social, and environmental (Including biodiversity) priorities; and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings.	31 December 2026	Strategic Director Sustainable Futures Assistant Director Planning and Regeneration.
Performance Management	To review the strategic approach to monitor, measure and review the council's performance.	31 March 2025	Strategic Director Resources and Governance; Assistant Director Workforce and Change.
Programme and Project Management Methodology	To agree clear project gateways and decision points within the Council's Project and Programme Management Framework, aligned to the corporate leadership meeting arrangements to enable well informed decisions.	31 March 2025	Strategic Director Resources and Governance; Assistant Director Workforce and Change.