

# Draft Annual Governance Statement 2025/26



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This Annual Governance Statement is a measurement of the Council's performance during 2025/26, against Thurrock Council's [Local Code of Corporate Governance](#), and Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) – [Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework \(2016\)](#).

Over the past year, Thurrock has made considerable progress in addressing its financial challenges and rebuilding strong, transparent governance. The assessment has identified the Council has improved governance arrangements in place with a positive and committed culture for identifying and implementing further improvements and actions.

Since government intervention in 2022, the government appointed Commissioners have recognised significant and consistent progress made, with the most recent [6<sup>th</sup> report](#) acknowledging that the Council continues to own its improvement and recovery.

However, given the need to complete and embed improvement – as well as the continued requirement of Exceptional Financial Support in order to set a balanced budget – Commissioners assessed that the Council was not yet meeting its best value duty ahead of the planned end of statutory intervention in September 2025. Intervention was therefore extended to cover the period up to the planned dissolution of Thurrock Council through local government reorganisation with a stepped-down model of intervention where the council can recruit a chief executive to replace the current managing director commissioner as head of paid service. At the time of writing, the recruitment is ongoing with expectations that an appointment will be made in July 2026.

### **Anticipated challenges ahead**

In late December 2024 the government announced the programme for devolution and local government reorganisation. Thurrock Council, alongside the councils in Greater Essex, was accepted onto the priority programme for both schemes. Work is progressing across the Council and with partner authorities in the greater Essex area. The coming year will require significant leadership capacity, officer time, and financial resources, and the need for additional specialist capacity has been identified. The scale and complexity of reorganisation will, therefore, present a risk to remaining planned improvements and the momentum of recovery seen so far.

The local government reorganisation model chosen by government presents several elements of anticipated financial challenge. Additional work will be required to further understand and analyse the combined debt of both Thurrock and Basildon Councils alongside the unknown value of budget disaggregation from Essex County Council. Robust plans will need to be made in order to ensure these anticipated challenges do not destabilise the progress made to date.

This is alongside a wider period of change where the Council is adjusting to new political leadership, a substantial number of councillors new to local government, recruitment of a Chief Executive as well as an ambitious transformation and savings programme. Whilst these changes represent opportunities, alongside local government reorganisation, the Council will need to double down on its efforts to remain focused on its capacity for improvement.

## ANNUAL GOVERNANCE ASSURANCE STATEMENT (2025/26)

The following statement is made by the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive / Managing Director Commissioner (who is also a Best Value Commissioner for Thurrock Council (the Council) appointed by the Secretary of State:

[To be added a statement on Leader/ Chief Exec's view for final version, noting that as Leader was elected May 2026, he may be unable to comment on the previous year and do a forward look.]

	Name	Signature	Print Name	Date
Leader of the Council				
Chief Executive and Managing Director Commissioner	Dave Smith			

Thurrock Council (the Council) is a unitary council in south Essex comprising a number of small towns and villages, located on the north side of the River Thames, immediately to the east of London. The Council has 49 elected councillors, representing 20 electoral wards.

The Council was scheduled to have all out elections in May 2025 and on new ward boundaries as decided in the 2024 Local Government Boundary Commission for England review. However, following a decision of the Secretary of State the elections were postponed providing the Council with capacity to engage with the priority programme for local government reorganisation and devolution. During this period, resignations were received from two councillors for the Ockendon ward and a by election was held on 1 May 2025. In May 2026, the postponed all-out elections were held, returned a new majority administration resulting in the appointment of a new Leader and Cabinet.

During 2025/26, the Council had a total revenue budget of £240.656m with an operating budget of £176.374m employed roughly 2,500 members of staff and delivered approximately 800 services to its 176,000 residents.

Since September 2002, the Council has been under government intervention which is currently overseen by three Commissioners. Whilst there is acknowledgment of good progress in several areas, the Council still has work to do to meet its best value duty and continue to reduce its debt.

During 2025/6, the Council operated a leader and cabinet model of executive governance. The Cabinet comprised of a leader and eight cabinet members each holding a portfolio of executive responsibilities, this reduced to seven part way through the year when one Cabinet Member resigned and their portfolio was integrated into an existing one. One of the cabinet members was appointed by the Leader as deputy leader. The Cabinet met 12 times during 2025/26.

All Cabinet meeting papers were published on the Council's website and meetings held in public, except for items considered exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (and where it was in the public interest to withhold the information from the public). Clear reasons were given why the exemption applied in the agenda papers.

The full Council comprising of all 49 councillors held five ordinary meetings, plus annual council and budget council during the year 2025/26 and two extraordinary meetings were called at the request of opposition members.

The Council appointed four overview and scrutiny committees to undertake the Council's statutory function under the Local Government Act 2000 to scrutinise the executive and its decision making and undertake reviews of policy matters affecting the borough. Overview and scrutiny committees had the statutory power to "call in" for review decisions made by the Cabinet but not yet implemented.

The new model of scrutiny introduced in May 2024 was reviewed in March 2025 by the CfGS. They found that the model had been a success. It was agreed by members and officers to establish a fourth O&S Committee, by dividing People O&S into specialist Adults and Health and Children's committees. This allowed greater focus on the two areas of safeguarding. The council therefore operated four overview and scrutiny committees in 2025/26 – Adults & Health, Children's, Corporate and Place. Further information relating to the activities and performance of the scrutiny function can be found in the 2025/26 O&S Annual Report.

The Council owns one subsidiary company – Thurrock Regeneration Limited (TRL) registered at Companies House under company number 08745616. TRL is a Council wholly owned

regeneration company, which was set up in 2013. It has its own subsidiary – Thurrock Regeneration Homes Limited, incorporated in 2017, and registered at Companies House under company number 10697450.

The Council's prepared group accounts includes balances from these companies.

TRL is funded from loans and land sold from the Council to TRL at market value, in return for shares / equity.

Thurrock Regeneration Homes Ltd is 100% owned by TRL and provides estate management and lettings for the properties built by TRL. It is recognised that there is an absence of oversight and grip by the Council on TRL and there is a piece of work being taken forward about future planning and what happens to the subsidiary company, including whether it can be wound up. This will be taken forward as a requirement of the action plan set out in this AGS.

The Council originally invested £30 m in bonds in [PWE Holdings](#) in three tranches in 2018. £20 m was outstanding when the bonds matured in December 2020. Following a refinancing the Council received a payment of £1m debt in 2022. The Council retained a debt of £2m which is being repaid as a loan, but the remainder of the debt was converted to equity making the Council the majority (94%) owner of PWE.

The Council is also the Accountable Body for Thames Freeport. Legal agreements have been signed by all Thames Freeport parties. This means that the arrangements between the parties have been agreed and longer-term planning can be developed. As a result, this helps to achieve the robust internal oversight, political and senior leadership, decision making and governance frameworks and developed meaningful and productive partnerships outcomes. The Council is also the Accountable Body for the Grays Towns Fund and Tilbury Towns Fund.

The governance arrangements in relation to Thurrock Regeneration Limited, PWE Holdings, Thames Freeport and Towns Funds have not been assessed as part of this 2025/26 Annual Governance Statement. However, assurance can be provided that the Council's monitoring and oversight of its subsidiary company and position as accountable body where relevant has been improved, for example: the situation with regard to PWE is reviewed regularly under the Divestment Strategy workstream; there is a Freeport Accountable Body governance meeting every two weeks and significant work has been undertaken during 2025/26 to make arrangements regarding overarching governance agreements with reports being taken at appropriate junctures to cabinet to take decisions regarding the Council's role in the Freeport.

Governance can be defined as **'the arrangements put in place to ensure that the intended outcomes for stakeholders are defined and achieved.'**

The Council is required by law to review its arrangements for internal control and governance at least once a year<sup>1</sup>. The outcomes of the annual governance review are set out in an Annual Governance Statement (AGS hereafter), which is submitted for consideration and approval by a committee of the Council. In Thurrock, the Audit Committee has delegated authority to approve the AGS. The approved AGS is signed by the Leader and Chief Executive and published as part of the Council's accounts.

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<sup>1</sup> regulation 6, [Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015/234](#)

The AGS is a key document, which should provide reasonable assurance to all stakeholders that processes and systems have been established, which ensure decisions are properly made and scrutinised and that public money, is being spent economically and effectively to ensure maximum benefit to everyone who is served by the Council.

The AGS provides an overview of the controls in place to manage key governance risks and where risks are identified the actions which will be completed to make the relevant improvements.

The AGS will support the continuous improvement of governance within the Council.

Following reporting of the 2024/2025 AGS to the Council's Audit Committee in Summer 2025, it was agreed that an update would be taken on progress against the actions set out in it before the end of the municipal year. A report was taken to Audit Committee for this purpose in March 2026. Subject to Audit Committee agreeing this as part of their work programme, officers would propose following this approach again.

This document provides Thurrock Council's 2025/26 Annual Governance Statement and Action Plan.

## BEST VALUE INTERVENTION

In September 2022, the then Secretary of State for Levelling-up, Housing and Communities made directions under section 15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999 to implement an intervention package for Thurrock Council, which transferred the financial functions to Commissioners and initiated a Best Value Inspection. The government also directed Thurrock Council to develop an Improvement and Recovery plan which formed the basis for the council's recovery and charts the course back to being a well-run authority.

Governance structures were put in place to allow the Commissioners to discharge these duties. A Finance Recovery Board was established and began meeting fortnightly from 10 October 2022 (latterly this meeting has been held bi-monthly). An Improvement and Recovery Board was also established and now meets quarterly.

Following the findings of the [Best Value Inspection report](#) (June 2023), the intervention was expanded to include governance, the officer structure, how the council delivers services and the council was directed to produce an Enhanced Improvement and Recovery Plan and a Governance Recovery Board established to have oversight of improvements in governance.

A Managing Director Commissioner was appointed to act as the Chief Executive.

The current Commissioner Team (and their primary focus) is as follows:

- Gavin Jones – Lead Commissioner and Chair of the Improvement and Recovery Board
- Denise Murray – Finance Commissioner and Chair of the Finance Recovery Board
- Dr Dave Smith – Managing Director Commissioner and Chair of the Governance Recovery Board

The terms of reference and minutes of all boards overseeing our improvement work can be found [here](#) on the Thurrock Council website.

From the outset of the intervention, Commissioners have worked constructively with members and officers to ensure proactive engagement. In practice, Council decisions continue to be taken by the Council with Commissioners' powers held in reserve and used where they deem necessary.

Commissioners review all Cabinet reports and, if they are unhappy with a proposed decision, may stop it from being made. This has not happened in practice.

In July 2025, following the publication of Commissioners' fifth report, a [written ministerial statement](#) from the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution announced the extension of the intervention at Thurrock Council until 30 April 2028. The Minister also confirmed the appointment of the current three Commissioners, Gavin Jones CBE (Lead), Denise Murray (Finance) and Dr Dave Smith (Managing Director Commissioner).

The [Directions](#) were updated to reflect the improvement Thurrock Council had made since the beginning of the intervention and the wider context of Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution. The new Directions required the Council to incorporate the remaining aspects of its improvement and recovery work into a revised Corporate Plan.

In October 2025, the Council adopted a new Corporate and Improvement Plan. Full details are on our [Corporate and Improvement plan](#) pages of the Council's website.

The Commissioners' sixth report published in January 2026 highlighted the continued positive direction of travel for the Council's improvement. This led to the Minister agreeing the commissioners' recommendation that sufficient progress had been made to allow the model of intervention to be stepped down. In particular, the Minister agreed the Council could commence the recruitment of a chief executive to replace the current office of managing director commissioner as the Council's head of paid service.

The sixth report also identified six priority areas of focus for the next period which they want to be assured that the Council has a plan and line of sight of achieving. They are:

1. Transformation benefits that are sufficiently defined to support the production of the MTFs and successfully achieve the required financial savings, and delivery plans developed and managed by all relevant departments across the Council.
2. The revised constitution, financial regulations, and scheme of delegation are all agreed and finalised by the start of the new municipal year.
3. Continued delivery of the Council's debt reduction strategy and an agreed understanding of the level of retained debt that the Council can sustainably hold.
4. Continued embedding of improvements across the system of internal controls, and action plans in place to ensure compliance with relevant regulatory requirements and standards.
5. An effective model of individual performance management agreed and allied with the Council's Corporate and Improvement Plan, service plans and Performance Management and Assurance Framework.
6. An embedded programme of meaningful engagement with staff, residents and partners to rebuild trust and confidence in the Council, further building on the positive work to date.

## COMMISSIONERS COMMENTS

The following wording has been extracted from the most recent [Commissioners' Report](#) which is dated 5 November 2025 and was published in January 2026.

*"One of the key areas of progress that Commissioners wanted to see from the organisation was its development of a Council-wide transformation roadmap and it is pleasing to report that in conjunction with a strategic partner, there has been considerable progress in this area. Delivery of*

*the transformation agenda will stretch organisational capacity yet further and it will be important that Members and officers are able to demonstrate the leadership capacity to balance implementation of this roadmap with its other major transformation programmes of local government reorganisation and devolution. Furthermore, the Council will need to ensure that it has access to both capacity and capability across and throughout the organisation to meet these challenges...*

*“The Council continues to retain a tight grip on its finances, both in year and in the medium term. However, the capacity of the finance team remains limited and to a degree, progress is inhibited by some systems and processes that are still not fit for purpose, which the Council needs to address. The Council also continues to prioritise making the required savings and taking the other necessary steps to reduce its level of debt. Conversations with Government continue and it is vital that the Council develops an agreed understanding about a sustainable level of debt that it could hold.*

*“There is increasing cohesiveness within the Senior Leadership Team, and this will help the Council deal with some remaining issues of organisational fragility, as identified in our previous report. Having a united, collaborative Senior Leadership Team will also enable a smooth transition away from the current arrangements to a Chief Executive model, as our conclusion outlines, but only if a successful recruitment process takes place and a suitable candidate can be identified. Senior officers will need to ensure they continue to support and challenge each other constructively as they transform the Council and as they go through the next phase of their improvement journey.”*

## METHODOLOGY FOR GOVERNANCE ASSESSMENT

The 2025/26 AGS has been prepared following a full governance assessment against CIPFA's [Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework \(2016\)](#) and in-accordance with [Thurrock Council's Code of Corporate Governance](#).

The governance assessment has been set out against the following seven principles:

<b>A.</b> Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law
<b>B.</b> Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
<b>C.</b> Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits
<b>D.</b> Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
<b>E.</b> Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within in.
<b>F.</b> Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
<b>G.</b> Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to effective accountability

### Summary of Significant Strengths and Weaknesses

The areas of weakness identified below are taken through to the action plan at pages 43 to 46 to be addressed during the year 2026/27.

<p>A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law</p>	<p>Areas of strength</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally good conduct from councillors and consistently low code of conduct complaints numbers.</li> <li>• Embedded reporting and decision making process for cabinet, council and committees. Business Support Officer meeting, engagement between CEO Office and Democratic Services, and forward planning for key decisions is working well.</li> <li>• Strong work on development of new Performance Management Framework.</li> </ul>
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	Areas of weakness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process of code of conduct complaints is too slow and feedback that there is a lack of visibility for complainants/ subject members.</li> <li>• Constitution review off track (due to multiple factors, some of which are outside of control, such as elections)</li> <li>• Delegated key decisions are not consistently being added to forward plan at least 28 days in advance of decision being taken.</li> </ul>
B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement	Areas of strength	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The council saw a significant increase in engagement with council consultations over this period, helping to ensure that local people had a say in the decisions that affect them.</li> <li>• The council also gave local people more opportunities to engage with council representatives through its Ask the Council public question time events, held at locations across the borough, and other events to promote initiatives such as the Thurrock Cares cost of living campaign</li> <li>• Established and effective partnership working with the Thames Freeport.</li> </ul>

	Areas of weakness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement and attendance at events is generally lower than in other boroughs, and may be due to the breakdown in trust between the council and communities that we are working hard to rebuild.</li> <li>FOI and SAR compliance with statutory deadlines has slipped marginally below the ICO's 90% target. Work is already underway to improve this via engagement and use of digital tools.</li> </ul>
C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits	Areas of strength	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corporate plan and performance reporting via the PMAF embedded and effective.</li> </ul>
	Areas of weakness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issues identified in external auditor's letter. While not necessarily agreed by the organisation still need to be addressed.</li> </ul>
D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes	Areas of strength	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performance management golden thread from corporate objectives established.</li> <li>Production of the transformation roadmap.</li> <li>Openness to external engagement and scrutiny (e.g. peer review) and learning from others.</li> </ul>
	Areas of weakness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Across roadmap and peer review programmes of work and actions have been developed, but now delivery is necessary on these and that is a significant organisational capacity challenge.</li> </ul>
E. Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its	Areas of strength	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Targeted training for councillors and leadership network.</li> </ul>

leadership and the individuals within in.	Areas of weakness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reliance on agency staff continues to be a challenge.</li> <li>• Recruitment to specific hard to fill finance posts on a permanent basis.</li> </ul>
F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management	Areas of strength	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthened cyber security and capacity</li> </ul>
	Areas of weakness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to do to embed risk into culture of organisation.</li> <li>• Records management, particularly physical records as identified in Internal Audit report.</li> </ul>
G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to effective accountability	Areas of strength	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved Annual Governance Statement content and process</li> </ul>
	Areas of weakness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal Audit recruitment remains a concern with one post vacant.</li> </ul>

**A. BEHAVING WITH INTEGRITY, DEMONSTRATING STRONG COMMITMENT TO ETHICAL VALUES, AND RESPECTING THE RULE OF LAW**

**Framework**

The Council maintains a clear ethical framework as part of its constitution, which is underpinned by the Nolan Principles of standards in public life. This includes a code of conduct (based on the LGA model code), a complaints process, and also an officer's code of conduct as well as a protocol for member/ officer relationships. The Monitoring Officer is responsible for the ethical and standards framework for the council.

**Standards Committee**

The Standards Committee is responsible for: promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members of the authority, receiving periodic reports on complaints received under the Members Code of Conduct, and advising on member training.

During 2025/26 the Committee met on 15 July 2025, 18 November 2025, and 17 February 2026 (link Standards Committee agendas). At each meeting a report was considered providing an update on the ethical framework of the Council, namely reporting on gifts and hospitality, declarations of interest and code of conduct complaints during the period. As reported in last year's AGS an annual report of code of conduct complaints matters for 24/25 was taken to the Standards Committee in July 2025, and reporting was amended to reflect committee's comments to include timescales for resolution of complaints and details of outcomes.

On 29 September 2025 a Hearing Panel of the Standards Committee was convened to hear a complaint regarding councillor conduct that had proceeded to investigation. The Hearing Panel concluded that there had been a breach of the Code of Conduct.

Standards Committee also considered papers reviewing member training programme and newly established member development programme, which were well received. Having been introduced during 2024/25, Member training records were produced to the Committee and they reviewed attendance records from training at their February meeting.

A briefing note was taken to the November 2025 meeting on the proposed introduction of changes to the standards regime, and in particular the government's response to the consultation on strengthening the standards and conduct framework.

**Conduct**

During the period 25/26 there was a relatively low level of new member conduct complaints, 10 in total and which was the same as the period 2024/25. One complaint went to a hearing panel (referenced above) and three complaints were recommended for investigation at initial

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assessment stage. These remain outstanding as it was unable to complete the process due to the election. As all of the affected councillors were not re-elected, a determination will now be made, based on the public interest, as to whether they proceed. The majority of complaints were against two councillors including all of the complaints that required investigation. This is indicative of overall a strong commitment to behaving with integrity, commitment to ethical values and mutual respect across the vast majority of councillors. In terms of the process of standards complaints, it is acknowledged by officers that their assessment and, if necessary, investigation is taking too long, primarily as a result of officer capacity and also the appointment of external investigators. A complainant has also reported not being kept up to date or supported during the process. Officers are working on embedding process improvements to make complaints more efficient and to ensure that more regular updates are provided to both complainants and those subject to complaints.

On the whole collaboration between councillors and officers works well, and the standard of conduct in meetings is generally high, but that there are a limited number of incidences where members who do not conduct themselves in this way.

### **Constitution review**

A significant amount of further work has been undertaken on the constitution review during 2025/26, although the project is behind on its target timeline, primarily due to the late notice given that the May elections would go ahead. The rules relating to the role and rules for Cabinet and Council have been approved by Constitution Working Group and General Services Committee and need approval from Council. Due to the elections, it was not possible to approve these provisions at the planned April Council, due to its cancellation. Conduct protocols that support the ethical framework on Social Media, Gifts and Hospitality and Councillor/Officer relationships have been approved by Standards Committee and are again waiting Council approval. As required by the statutory directions, draft financial procedure rules have been drafted for committee consideration and preparatory and drafting work on the Council's scheme of delegation is underway for discussion with the new administration. At the time of drafting, a refreshed project plan and approach is being proposed for agreement with the new administration and commissioners.

### **Local Code of Corporate Governance**

The Local Code of Corporate Governance was adopted in October 2024 and now requires review to ensure that it reflects current practice. This review and any necessary updates will be taken forward as an action from this AGS.

### **Decision making**

## A. BEHAVING WITH INTEGRITY, DEMONSTRATING STRONG COMMITMENT TO ETHICAL VALUES, AND RESPECTING THE RULE OF LAW

As evidenced in commissioners' reports governance is improving and this has been reflected by public statements from members at meetings that they are of the view that they are receiving better quality information in reports. For example, at budget setting council in February 2026 a number of members stated that while the financial picture for the council was still significantly challenging, they recognised the work undertaken by the finance team to regularise the position and considered that they were receiving fuller and more transparent information in reports.

There is still work to do to ensure that there is consistency in high quality reporting and decision making across the board. The Deputy Monitoring Officer has continued to deliver monthly reporting writing training sessions, which have been well received by attendees. These will continue through 2026/27 and be targeted to those who have not previously attended, or where the service area is particularly high demand in terms of decision making. Decision-making processes will also be reviewed to take into account the focus and priorities of the new administration whilst continuing to ensure good governance and effective decision making.

The [forward plan](#) is well populated and is now established in the Mod.Gov system and across the Council. It is reviewed weekly by the Senior Leadership Team and future Cabinet agendas are reviewed. There are fortnightly meetings between officers in Democratic Services and Business Support Officers in directorates to drive that forward look of decision making and enable proper planning. A calendar timetable of compliance dates for each cabinet meeting is also circulated by Democratic Services.

The level of use of the Council's urgency provisions (which have to be used where a key decision is not on a forward plan), are a good indicator of whether robust governance arrangements are in place across the organisation. During the period urgency notices were used on 11 occasions, one of which was special urgency procedures. The special urgency decision related to a contract extension for the NATIS service following a last minute decision by the contractor, the Department of Business and Trade not to extend the contract with NATIS long-term and instead transfer the function to the Insolvency Service. There was a significant risk (including an estimated £1.2m redundancy costs) if the contract with DBT had expired.

Absence of entry of a forward plan item, which then necessitates urgency provisions being accessed, seems to be most prevalent on delegated key decisions. Training and engagement is proposed to take place on this during 2026/27.

There was a particular challenge in January 2026 in relation to notice provided for an urgent cabinet meeting to consider the decision to request postponement of elections due to take place in May 2026. The general exception was being utilised and this requires notice to be published (both physically at the office and online) 5 clear working days prior to the meeting, together with the relevant chair of overview and scrutiny committee being notified. The notice was prepared and published at the offices, the notice period was correct and the chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee was notified. However, by omission the notice was not published online. This was a technical error in breach of the

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regulations, and while it was considered not to materially make any difference to the decision, the Monitoring Officer published a public report on the issue: [monitoring officer briefing re cabinet 130126 190126.pdf](#)

### **Integrity**

The Council is committed to acting with integrity and is one of the seven Nolan Principles underpinning the Council's codes of conduct for members and officers.

Constitutional changes that promote transparency and members rights have been considered by councillors and agreed for approval by full council.

In addition to internal audit work reported elsewhere in this statement, the Audit Committee have received reports on:

- RIPA annual report
- Mid year and annual reporting on compliance with Information Governance requirements
- Mid year and annual reporting on complaints and enquiries
- An update on activity against actions contained in the 2024/25 AGS

Register of interest forms have been completed by all councillors which includes details of disclosable pecuniary interests. Councillors are reminded of the obligation every three months. Gifts and hospitality records are submitted by councillors to Democratic Services with quarterly reminders. All records are published on the council's website, save for details of those items considered to be sensitive interests such as councillors home addresses.

### **Member training**

Due to the postponement by the Secretary of State of all-out elections to Thurrock Council in May 2025, it was not necessary to have a full induction day of new councillors as had been planned. However, there was a by-election for two seats in the Ockendon ward on 1 May 2025 and the 2 new councillors for those seats received a comprehensive induction separately. The day that had been earmarked for induction, was pivoted to a member development day with a range of topics covered included a commissioner led session, an external trainer and relevant officers providing an update on local government reorganisation and devolution.

Member training was delivered on a range of topics including (but not limited to): code of conduct; overview and scrutiny; planning; the role of internal audit; licensing; intervention improvement and recovery; corporate parenting; and finance budget and effective oversight. A comprehensive

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paper was taken to Standards Committee in [February 2026 to update on member training and development. Work started towards the end of the 25/26 year to plan for a comprehensive training and induction plan for members following May 2026 elections.](#)

### **Culture**

As reported in the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 a set of Improvement and Recovery Plan outcomes and success criteria have been developed to measure progress and to report quarterly to cabinet. For 2025/26 these were adopted into part of the 'business as usual' corporate plan to become the Corporate and Improvement Plan and reported via the quarterly and annual corporate performance reports, as detailed elsewhere in this AGS. [https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s45762/Thurrock Councils Improvement and Recovery Report.pdf](https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s45762/Thurrock%20Councils%20Improvement%20and%20Recovery%20Report.pdf)[https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s47291/Thurrock Council Improvement and Recovery Second Report.pdf](https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s47291/Thurrock%20Council%20Improvement%20and%20Recovery%20Second%20Report.pdf)[https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s48916/Thurrock Council Improvement Recovery.pdf](https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s48916/Thurrock%20Council%20Improvement%20Recovery.pdf)

### **Whistleblowing**

The Council maintains a whistleblowing policy which can be found [here](#). This has been recently updated to reflect changes in employment legislation. A limited number of whistleblowing complaints were received during the period. An update report on whistleblowing will be taken to Audit Committee during 26/27 which will include an annual review of complaints received during 2025/26.

### **Review of HR policies**

During 2026/25 a detailed programme commenced to review and refresh all HR policies. The Senior Leadership Team agreed to a prioritisation process and this period saw HR policies relating to new requirements of employment law prioritised. Unions have been engaged and supported this work alongside staff networks. As a result, we now have a suite of fit for purpose policies which are also more accessible for staff and their managers to interact with. A significant policy area updated in this period included the Performance Management Framework which will see improvements in the practical application of objective setting, meaningful performance conversations and identifying underperformance early. The wider programme continues and more policies will be reviewed and updated in the coming year.

## B. ENSURING OPENNESS AND COMPREHENSIVE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

### **Communication and engagement with communities**

The council saw a significant increase in engagement with council consultations over this period, helping to ensure that local people had a say in the decisions that affect them.

The council also gave local people more opportunities to engage with council representatives through its Ask the Council public question time events, held at locations across the borough, and other events to promote initiatives such as the Thurrock Cares cost of living campaign

Engagement and attendance at events is generally lower than in other boroughs, and may be due to the breakdown in trust between the council and communities that we are working hard to rebuild.

### **How our engagement with residents supports the design and delivery of our services.**

Across the 2025/26 financial year, 3,180 of our social housing properties were visited and almost 3,800 tenants spoken to as part of the council's Property and Wellbeing Check-in programme, which has been recognised by the Housing Innovation Awards, replacing transactional audits with personal conversations and acting on issues tenants raised including raising repairs on the spot. <sup>2</sup>

The 2025/26 financial year also saw the establishment of the council's Housing Service Tenants Panel. The Housing Service Tenants Panel is a tenant-led forum that gives tenants a structured way to influence, scrutinise and help improve Thurrock's landlord services. It provides a clear route for tenants to share lived experience, test whether services are meeting expectations and contribute to improvement work linked to the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards. The Panel helps strengthen transparency, accountability and tenant voice by bringing resident insight into service planning, performance discussions, policy development and wider service improvement activity.

The Panel is supported by focused working groups that look in more detail at key service areas. These are Health and Safety, covering repairs, planned maintenance and compliance; Complaints, focusing on complaint handling, learning and service improvement; and Tenancy, looking at tenancy-related services, support and resident experience. These groups allow tenants to review issues in more depth, identify priorities, make

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<sup>2</sup> [Thurrock's housing innovations praised at national awards. - Thurrock Council intranet](#)

## B. ENSURING OPENNESS AND COMPREHENSIVE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

practical recommendations and feed their views back into the main Panel, helping ensure tenant involvement is meaningful and connected to real improvements.

Taken from the draft Annual Report: We ran 21 consultations with 4,637 responses. Following feedback on HGV restrictions, we have introduced traffic cameras to improve road safety, air quality and reduce congestion.<sup>3</sup> Further work is planned based on residents views including new outdoor gyms in Purfleet on Thames and Corringham Town Park, and accessible play areas all children can enjoy in Purfleet and Dilkes Park in Ockendon which should be ready by summer 2026.<sup>4</sup>

Following feedback from the summer public consultation, traffic enforcement cameras have now been introduced in parts of Thurrock to improve road safety, reduce congestion, and prevent Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) misuse.

The Communities in Action project is a community-led pilot initiative by Thurrock Council and Thurrock CVS designed to engage residents in local decision-making and service design. During in 2025/26 residents and representatives have reported that they are pleased with the positive progress to date, building strong connections and trust between the council and wider community as a solid foundation for improving joined-up service delivery for the future. A review session with community leaders in Chadwell St Mary was held in March 2026 and the feedback was positive. This work is a step towards rebuilt trust and confidence with staff, members, the public and partners.

The wider Neighbourhoods programme is exploring how the lessons from the Chadwell pilot can be adapted to develop local plans with contributions from local voluntary and community organisations. Engagement to inform the Tilbury plan has started, with Grays to follow in 2026/27. This work is seeing a new approach to engaging with residents by fully engaging communities in co-producing plans for their areas and deciding how to spend external funding. While this will take time to roll out across the whole borough, other measures to engage better with residents, such as our improved approach to consultation, and ongoing public meeting programme, is demonstrating to residents that we are here to listen and respond.

### **Collaborative partnerships**

We have been working hard to collaborate with key stakeholder to mobilise Sports England investment in 2025/26. As a result, our partnership approach is resulting in improved population health and wellbeing outcomes and reduced health inequalities for our residents. This has included physical activity sessions run across all Community Big Lunches, 3 community green spaces/parks activated, expansion of the Stay Active Stay

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<sup>3</sup> [Have your say on HGV Restrictions in Thurrock | Have my say | Thurrock Council](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Residents shape major improvements to parks and play areas across Thurrock | Thurrock Council](#)

## B. ENSURING OPENNESS AND COMPREHENSIVE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Well programme into community settings in Chadwell St Mary, South Ockendon and Tilbury, the introduction of a falls prevention programme, 3 new physical activity networks set up in Chadwell St Mary, South Ockendon and Tilbury. 69% of all projects across the 5 key thematic areas in the Sport England Place Expansion programme (and 100% of those led by Thurrock that started in 2025/26) are in mobilisation or delivery. Work continues into Year 2 of the 3 year programme, which will include pre and post-natal physical activity, swimming programme for children with SEND, a new 'Fun Trail' at Belhus, which will also support Couch to 5K and a junior park run concept, a new mass participation programme ('Backside to Trackside',) at the athletics track and Free weekly Park Tennis at Blackshots.

2025/26 saw a new approach to homecare with providers actively engaging in continuous learning and development to drive measurable efficiency improvements and better citizen outcomes. As a result, this work has seen a reduction in loneliness. Further time is required for quantitative evidence, but early evidence is very promising. This shows how we are designing services so residents can live fulfilling lives with the individual and family at heart.

This period also saw an enhanced approach to working with partners to embed cross-sector infrastructure planning through joint work with partners on S106 contributions. Cross-departmental engagement on infrastructure planning means we can effectively coordinate activity through the Strategic Infrastructure Board, ensuring that S106 contributions are directed appropriately to minimise the impact of new development on local communities. For example, funding for Thameside Primary to replace their temporary alternative provision with a new build. In parallel, the Health Regeneration Working Group remains active and well-established, supporting a joined-up approach to planning, health outcomes and place-based infrastructure needs. Collectively, these arrangements provide strong governance and clear oversight of infrastructure priorities. This supports the necessary transport infrastructure and sufficient good quality affordable homes.

We have established a strong partner relationship with the Thames Freeport to deliver Economic Growth programmes including the Thames Freeport Social Value Commission. The Council continues to work with the Freeport to build a stronger relationship as a partner with regular meetings and an ongoing dialogue between Council staff and the Freeport team. Council priorities have been taken on board and are reflected in the business plan for 2026/7. The Freeport are now engaging more with individual services and groups across Thurrock and making strategic investments that add value to existing delivery. The Social Value framework is designed to influence Freeport decision making from 2026/7 onward. This shows how the Council has developed meaningful and productive partnerships.

### **Transparency and governance**

It is possible for reports or parts of reports to be exempt from discussion in public meetings and publication where the contents of the report may need to remain restricted from press and public disclosure. To be withheld, a report (or part of it) must fall within one or more provision in Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 and, if so, it must still be in the public interest to withhold the information from press and public access. This must be explained in the report. Decisions to treat reports as exempt are considered by the individual who undertakes the legal and governance review

## B. ENSURING OPENNESS AND COMPREHENSIVE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

of reports on behalf of the monitoring officer. It has been necessary at times during 2025/26 to take fully exempt reports to cabinet, for example on sensitive litigation where any information in the public domain would likely prejudice the council's litigation and negotiation position in the court proceedings significantly. However, the approach taken is to seek to balance the need to keep certain aspects of information supporting decision making confidential while also meeting transparency requirements for decision making. Use of public reports with exempt appendices has been used successfully to strike this balance, for example in September 2025 Cabinet considered a report requesting approval to dispose of a number of the council's retail parades. Information regarding the decision was in the public report, with confidential information such as valuation advice in exempt papers. A link to the decision record demonstrating the approach is attached here: [Decision - Asset Disposal - Retail Parade Disposal | Thurrock Council](#)

### FOI and SARs

Responding effectively and within statutory timescales to requests for information via either the Freedom of Information Act or Subject Access Request process is an important part of a council complying with transparency requirements. Both mid-year and annual reports on compliance with information governance requirements are taken to the Audit Committee. The mid-year position for 2025/26 as taken to Audit Committee in [March](#). This reported across a range of information governance metrics including FOI and SAR compliance, data breach and records management activity. At the mid-year point 555 FOIs had been received and 85% responded to within the statutory timeframe, and of 126 SARs received during the period 87% were responded to within the statutory time period. For the final AGS in the autumn the full year outturn figures will be provided. On FOI compliance a paper was taken to SLT to highlight the issue and to drive cross organisational engagement in response to FOIs and to improve timeliness of response.

The council publishes the responses to FOI requests and these can be found here: [FOI Disclosure Log | Thurrock Council](#)

As reported at the mid-year point to Audit Committee there were 12 SAR that were significantly beyond compliance date. This is because they are large requests, complex and require a significant volume of information to be provided (for example safeguarding files). They amount to thousands of pages of data and each request requires a manual review and redaction at present, which involves a significant amount of officer time. At times during 25/26 the Information Governance team were undertaking overtime to progress these time intensive requests. The Information Commissioners Office is aware and a quarterly update is provided on progress. Further, proposals were developed during the latter part of 2025/26 to acquire specific redaction software that will digitally review and redact documentation. The document will then still require officer overview but should significantly reduce officer time. Officers have spoken to colleagues at LB Merton who have developed the software and report that significant efficiencies have been gained as a result.

## C. DEFINING OUTCOMES IN TERMS OF SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

### Corporate & Improvement Plan – golden thread, strategy development

In summer 2024, Full Council agreed a Corporate Plan via a programme of resident, staff and councillor engagement. This was the first Corporate Plan adopted by the Council in several years. The Plan plays an important role in setting an overarching vision and outlining our purpose and priorities for the coming years. Publishing the Plan has increased the Council's transparency and accountability. We track our performance against the commitments in the Plan and use its contents as the starting point for business planning across all services supporting a golden thread of purpose and accountability throughout the Council.

In 2025, the Plan was refreshed to incorporate the improvement work required as part of the intervention. As a result, we now have one clear set of strategic priorities and primary visioning document. During 2025/26, the Senior Leadership Team, Commissioners, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet received quarterly performance reports to understand how services are delivering against the priorities in the Plan.

Incorporating the intervention and improvement activity into the Corporate Plan supports the Council's ability to measure and track its journey to meeting its Best Value duty. A periodic assessment of Best Value is undertaken by the Corporate Policy & Improvement Manager, based upon an analysis of the relevant Corporate Performance Reporting, and supports analysis of the council's performance as well as designing appropriate milestones and metrics to track ongoing performance for the coming year to ensure that line-of-sight to areas of improvement is maintained.

In addition, an Annual Report for 2024/25 was published in summer 2025 to provide a view on the Council's performance over the past year as a whole. The Annual Report helps to raise understanding about the breadth of Council activity, the outcomes and impact being made and how public funds are being allocated. The Annual Report is a public-facing document that gives residents the opportunity to scrutinise our performance and is an important element of increasing accountability.

### Data quality and performance information within services

The Performance Management Assurance Framework (PMAF) was strengthened to include good practice expectations for consistent service performance activity across the organisation. This utilised areas of strength across the organisation to inform the principles and a draft of a Service Level Performance Monitoring Tool Kit that is soon to be finalised and published. In advance of this, support is being provided directly to services and will continue to ensure good practice is known and embedded.

Self service reporting continues to be developed and either introduced or enhanced with business need in mind, this is with an aim to achieving equity of reporting solutions across the organisation. There is a robust development cycle for these which includes business requirements gathering, documentation of specification and user acceptance testing, to ensure contextual correctness, prior to go-live. These projects often

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identify the need for more formalised recording practices to support good quality data, and work is undertaken collaboratively with service representatives and our ICT colleagues in development of case management systems to capture data in a consistent, reliable and usable format.

### **Fair access to services (CEIA)**

Community Equality Impact Assessment (CEIA) is the council's approach to ensuring decision makers not only have 'due regard' and met the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty but that there are arrangements in place to consider fair access to services. It provides a structured, evidence-based framework to identify and address how policies, projects, and decisions may affect residents, with a particular focus on preventing disadvantage and improving inclusion. While it incorporates consideration of the nine protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010, the CEIA is strengthened by embedding local context, ensuring that decisions are informed by data, community insight, and an understanding of how inequalities are experienced in the borough.

The broader, place-based focus of CEIA and explicit consideration to other characteristics including socio-economic disadvantage, recognises that income, employment, and access to resources significantly affect people's ability to access services. It also aligns with Thurrock's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, ensuring that services contribute to reducing inequalities and improving outcomes in areas such as housing, health, inclusion, and opportunity. By incorporating impacts on the workforce and the armed forces community, alongside resident needs, the CEIA also ensures a more holistic understanding of fairness, helping the Council to identify practical actions - such as targeted support, accessible service design, and inclusive engagement - that improve equity and ensure services work effectively for all communities in Thurrock.

During in 2025/26, internal audit reviewed the council's compliance to its public sector equality duty. The review found that processes were in place to ensure compliance including guidance, training and embedment of consideration into procurement, complaints and Whistleblowing, as well as annual workforce reporting.

### **Cabinet reports process, implication and training**

During 2025/26 work continued on embedding improvements in the quality and timeliness of reports within the organisation. This work has resulted in Members commenting on the improved quality of reporting, for example at budget council, where financial challenges were acknowledged but the quality of the financial information before members in the reports was complemented. Reports for all committees have been published in compliance with the statutory timescale of 5 clear working days before the meeting. This is allowing time for committee members to better prepare for meetings and adequately consider the matters at hand.

During this year the reports pathway was refreshed with SLT and there has been strong engagement between Democratic Services, the Chief Executive and Leader's officers allowing for effective resolution of any issues. Democratic Services officers meet with Business Support Officers

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every fortnight to discuss the forward plan and there is a clear timetable of report oversight and deadlines. The Mod.Gov system is widely used for reporting. Report writing training has continued on a monthly basis, which has been well received. Attendance data from this training is being monitored to ensure that further training can be targeted to areas where there are gaps. This work demonstrates robust internal oversight, political and senior leadership, decision making and governance frameworks.

### **Strategic Commissioning project**

For many years, commissioning and procurement sat within directorates, with Adults, Children's and other services managing contracts locally. That local control helped services respond quickly to their users, but it also produced inconsistency, varied assurance, and missed opportunities for savings across the council's full contract portfolio. In 2025, the refreshed Corporate and Improvement Plan integrated recovery and improvement priorities. The plan calls for transparency, accountability, best value, and a one-council operating model.

The council's financial position, set out in budget papers, is challenging. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy requires ~£41m over three years, including £13.65m in savings in 2026/27, to meet the legal duty to set a balanced budget. Smarter Commissioning is part of the transformation work that contributes to those targets, and forms part of the broader enabling offer that sits alongside other council services.

Services have taken the work forward and achieved a lot. They have improved visibility of contracts, engaged providers more actively, and tackled legacy issues. That remedial work matters and shows strong capability in teams. However, working alone can only take us so far. To capture savings at scale, avoid duplication, and ensure consistent practice, the council needs a strategic, one-council approach with shared standards, market intelligence, and a coordinated view of spend. This is the direction set by the Corporate and Improvement Plan and reinforced by oversight requirements during the improvement journey.

Directorates have already delivered lots of remedial work. Adults and Children's teams have strengthened placement controls, tightened approvals, and used frameworks more consistently. Corporate functions have improved visibility and governance. The strategic commissioning workstream is an extension of what services have done, not a replacement. It turns local successes into a council-wide model so achievements in one area become standard everywhere.

At the corporate level, the refreshed Corporate and Improvement Plan sets the operating model and performance framework so commissioning improvements are tracked transparently and linked to priorities such as fixing foundations, modernising services, and enabling partners and communities.

### **Capital Programme**

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In setting the 2025/26 Capital Programme, the Council was mindful of its position as an authority in intervention where the focus is on strictly limiting future borrowing and capital spending. Within those constraints it was essential for the Council to prioritise its resources. The capital programme was put together taking account of the Council's financial position, intervention and the Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP), which are all underpinned by the need to reduce borrowing and the cost of borrowing on revenue budgets, especially the General Fund.

Following on from the 2024/25 review, additions to the capital programme in 2025/26 fell within one of the following four categories:

Health and Safety: to enhance safety standards or mitigate potential health and safety risks.

Return on investment proposals linked to MTFS savings.

Essential and non-avoidable maintenance and replacement of assets linked to cost avoidance.

Other additions that demonstrate benefits may be approved on a case-by-case basis.

For a variety of reasons there has been significant slippage of the 2025/26 programme. The General Fund Capital Programme outturn reflects an underspend of £87.462m (73%) against the revised budget of £120.250m. Of this variance, £82.209m relates to slippage into future years, while £5.253m arises from schemes not expected to fully utilise their budgets, with the associated funding released.

The HRA Capital Programme outturn reflects an underspend of £30.559m (50%) against the revised budget of £60.968m.

The scale of the slippage had been identified and reported throughout the year. The CFO recognises that effective budget management and accurate forecasting is crucial to ensure that resources are used efficiently and effectively, improving the Council's capital programme delivery and governance, focusing on clarity of strategic alignment, robust project management, enhanced financial oversight, and effective stakeholder engagement will be essential.

To emphasise the importance of effective planning and monitoring the delivery of individual projects, the CFO established a Capital Board during the year, attended by both Members and officers. The Board was established to provide a more robust governance and oversight framework, ensure capital expenditure is strategically aligned, affordable, prudent and sustainable, and projects are delivered on time and within budget.

Good governance around the management of the capital programme is important to ensure its alignment with strategic objectives of the council and that it is delivered against an agreed timeline and budget. The following requirements are to be enforced within the management of the capital programme for the year ahead and, for new bids, these criteria must be met before funding is made available, and to ensure that the existing programme meets the same requirements:

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- a) A robust business case is needed for all new capital projects. Release of funding and approval is contingent on the receipt of a robust business case, which is TM Treasury compliant and covering any health and safety issues.
- b) The project manager must be in a position to begin the project, within the agreed timeframe, having managed all preparatory procedures including the selection of a contractor, where necessary, via the appropriate procurement route;
- c) The project must adhere to the capital 'rules' governing what constitutes capital expenditure (please contact your finance business partner for clarification if necessary);
- d) the project must address the Councils corporate objectives and have member approval.

The results of the review undertaken by the Capital Board will be reported to Cabinet as part of Quarter 1 monitoring to allow a refinement of the Capital Programme to reflect realistic delivery expectations.

**Audit Letter** – The council's auditors, Ernst and Young (EY), highlighted issues they had experienced in working with the council on the 2024/25 audit during the course of this year, including the responsiveness of officers to requests for information and the meeting of informal deadlines. In response, the Chief Finance Officer has implemented changes to ensure constructive working arrangements between the council and EY, including designation of a responsible senior officer (Deputy s151) for the audit, a clear timetable setting out expectations on the remaining stages of the outstanding audits and the deployment of project management governance arrangements.

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## D. DETERMINING THE INTERVENTIONS NECESSARY TO OPTIMISE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF OUTCOMES

### **Alignment to the Council's vision**

The 2025/26 refresh of the Corporate Plan (Corporate and Improvement Plan) achieved several outcomes; to incorporate the improvement and intervention work so that all the council's priorities were in one place, to provide renewed focus on areas of importance (such as the transformation roadmap) and to simplify the language and structure to improve its readability and reach. The 2025/26 Service Plans were analysed and provided a useful cross check to review whether priorities and objectives were still relevant and to learn lessons about the effectiveness of the previous Plan's ability to articulate a compelling vision. Common themes across directorates and services were linked to strategic plans. This understanding supported both the development of the Corporate and Improvement Plan's detail of corporate priorities and the milestones for monitoring ongoing performance.

2025/26 also saw the publication of a Strategy Guide and register alongside a new offer of corporate peer support for strategy development, which ensures all strategies and strategic activity is aligned to deliver corporate priorities. This has also enabled our strategy landscape to be mapped against the current Corporate and Improvement Plan to see what strategies support the delivery of which priority, as well as overlaps whilst also identifying where there are gaps – either with no strategy, or where a strategy is out of date. These gaps have then been prioritised for peer support.

Service Planning takes place each year and services are asked to align planned activity to the Corporate priorities. During 2025/26 the Service Planning process was improved to simplify completion allowing services to spend more time on developing plans. The templates require services to consider how each of the Corporate & Improvement Plan priorities would be achieved.

### **A 'golden thread' throughout performance management arrangements**

The Performance Management and Assurance Framework policy was published in November 2024 and outlines a set of principles and standards for agreeing and monitoring performance data across the council. The Framework was reviewed in 2025/26, and a refreshed policy will be published in the coming year. The review has seen a greater emphasis on assurance teams triangulating data to ensure improvement opportunities are identified and targeted appropriately. The policy will also capture progress made to standardise data quality and service level performance monitoring as well aligning our approach to the recently published Performance Management process for staff, further strengthening the golden thread and delivery of service and corporate objectives.

The Data Mapping & Data Quality project has strengthened the accuracy, consistency and reliability of data, providing a more robust foundation for decision-making and performance monitoring. Scope for additional improvement in improving our data will be incorporated into the Action Plan and

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progressed through the Internal Customer Project, with completion scheduled for 2026/27. This work will make it easier for residents to access services for residents and information through a digital by design approach.

Published Corporate Performance reports monitor and track the Council's performance against a suite of metrics and milestones linked to each of the Corporate and Improvement Plan priorities and deliverables. The metrics and milestones are reviewed and updated annually to ensure our focus remains in the right area to best meet the priorities in the Plan. Each has a target and tolerance set at the beginning of the year and performance conversations take place with service areas to understand how performance can be stretched where appropriate alongside benchmarking against comparator authorities.

With the incorporation of the intervention improvement work into the Corporate Plan, this process also includes an assessment of how we are meeting our best value duty. The outcome of which informs the design of milestones to target progress in specific areas.

Services monitor their performance through regular Departmental Management Team and service level meetings. During 2025/26 a programme of work was undertaken, supported by the Insights, Intelligence and Performance team, to improve visibility, quality of data and analysis of performance, this has seen a launch of a suite of self serve reporting in adult services as well as services developing additional PowerBI Dashboards and a plan for more services developing dashboards in the coming year. Scorecards, self serve reporting and dashboards are ensuring that the right data and performance information is available for decision making to evidence based and informed.

To ensure we have capable, valued and motivated staff with a robust performance management framework the new People Performance Management Framework launched on 1st April 2026. This work has been developed due to inconsistent approaches being taken and non-compliance. The framework will now align with the wider performance management and assurance framework and ensures that the priorities described in the Corporate and Improvement plan are cascaded to individuals through annual objective setting. In the coming months we will monitor engagement of staff and test the effectiveness of the framework.

During 2025/26, 92% of staff members completed the end of year Performance Development Review and took part in a performance conversation with their line manager. In addition, People Performance Management training skills was commenced in February 2026 with 83% of the Council's Managers either having completed the training or signed up for a future session. These figures have not discounted those staff who are on long term sick, or maternity leave.

### **The Transformation Roadmap**

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As well as the specific financial challenges Thurrock Council faces, it is also subject to the same pressures of any unitary council. Financial pressures from increases in the scale and complexity of needs in Adult Services, SEND demand, and Home to School Transport are well documented. The rise in costs associated with delivering council services, coupled with the ongoing need for financial prudence can be responded to in two main ways. Thurrock council has embraced transformation, starting with the creation of a new Operating Model and then the production of a road map in 2025/26 to ensure the delivery of that model. Following the production of the road map, the later months of the year focused on delivering sound Business Cases for change and setting up projects. The next year will see delivery of some of the Benefits that have been identified, including substantial financial savings and non-financial benefits to the way staff work and directly to residents. Much of the change is being driven by digital and automation opportunities which will lead to residents being able to access services more easily.

Our transformation programme is organised into four Sub-programmes:

- Internal Customer - Improving internal services such as HR, Finance, IT and Legal so they are simpler, more joined-up and easier to use. This includes streamlining processes, reducing duplication and enabling appropriate self-service.
- Smarter Commissioning - Strengthening how we plan, buy and manage services. This includes improving oversight of the Council's £211m third-party spend and ensuring we get better value for money.
- Neighbourhoods - Shaping services around communities and neighbourhoods, strengthening how the council and its partners operate locally in ways that make sense and work well for local people, and ensuring funding, including external funding, is spent on the things residents want and need.
- Digital Customer and Workforce Innovation - Improving how residents access services and how staff are supported to deliver them. This includes modern digital tools, automation where appropriate, and better use of data.

Together, they:

- Support delivery of £40.95m of savings over a three-year period (from 2026/27 to 2028/29)
- Modernise services and embrace a new digital-first approach
- Improve consistency and efficiency
- Prepare Thurrock for local government reorganisation
- Protect service continuity for residents
- Improve the user experience and customer journey for staff and residents

### Corporate priority area of focus on Early intervention and prevention

Areas of priority focus are the subject of public quarterly reporting which are reviewed by SLT, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet. This additional attention allows for greater accountability and transparency of the issues and achievement of outcomes.

For Adults Social Care, the Corporate Performance Report monitors the delivery of significant pieces of service transformation designed to optimise the achievement of outcomes. These include collaborating with key stakeholders such as community groups, health partners and Sport England on initiatives to improve health and wellbeing of residents; remodelling services which have a positive impact on services users such as reablement; and monitoring the implementation of further micro-enterprises and the delivery of key contracted services such as those supporting victims of domestic abuse.

For Children's services, we monitor demand pressures with a focus on activity and initiatives which will support early intervention and prevention. These include:

**% of Children Looked After (on last day of month), placed more than 20 miles from their homes** - Sufficient local provision continues to be a key priority to meet the needs of our children. Some of the children (2%) are placed within kinship arrangements that are not local, and in some instances foster carers have moved from Thurrock (7%) and retained the care of the children placed with them. Additionally, there are three children placed 20+ miles from home inside the local authority boundary. There is a national shortage of regulated placements, alongside a rise in the complexity of needs among children requiring specialist care. In Thurrock, the scale of the borough and its proximity to London—where placement costs are typically higher—further restrict opportunities to develop sufficient local provision.

In response to these challenges, the council is taking proactive action through a targeted fostering recruitment strategy, aligned with the government's wider reform programme to improve foster care through the development of end-to-end fostering hubs. These hubs are intended to strengthen the full foster carer journey, from recruitment and assessment through to ongoing support, development, and retention, ensuring carers are well equipped to meet children's needs.

Recruitment activity is shaped by known sufficiency pressures, including the need for carers for older children, sibling groups, children from global majority backgrounds, and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This approach supports better matching and stability, in line with national ambitions to reduce reliance on out-of-area placements. This targeted and reform-aligned approach is improving local placement choice and matching, reducing the need to place children outside the borough due to a lack of suitable provision. As a result, the proportion of children placed with Thurrock-approved foster carers has increased year on year, demonstrating positive progress in keeping children closer to their communities and support networks.

## D. DETERMINING THE INTERVENTIONS NECESSARY TO OPTIMISE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF OUTCOMES

**Average weekly cost of external placements (Children's Social Care)** - The overall needs of children in Thurrock Council's care continue to increase, resulting in a sustained requirement for higher-cost care packages. This pressure is reflected in the Q4 average placement cost, which has remained high at £2,912, compared with £2,500 in the previous year, demonstrating the ongoing financial impact of increasing complexity. Further planned activity to reduce reliance on higher-cost provision and improve value for money includes; recommissioning Supported Accommodation by March 2027, subject to Ofsted's ability to register new providers, increasing local capacity and choice, commissioning an organisation to deliver local care from three Thurrock properties by June 2027, reflecting Ofsted guidance indicating a registration period of between 6 and 18 months for new children's homes and launching a new placement referral form for social workers, designed to promote a more strengths-based and needs-led description of children and young people. This is expected to generate a wider range of placement offers, enabling better matching and allowing commissioners to preference higher-quality and better-value options, supporting improved cost control over time.

**Developing the Families First Approach within Children's Services** – Scoping of the Family First Programme is on target to go live by end of March 2027 as planned including the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) having been informed by views and feedback from staff, partners, children, carers and the community. A successful partnership event was held in February. As a result of this discovery phase, we have started piloting and rolling out family help teams starting in the east of the borough. Thurrock has also been selected to be one of seven local authorities to take part in a national pilot bringing new financial support and improved services to kinship carers, the family and friends who look after children whose own parents are unable to. The Family First programme will support preventative services resulting in fewer expensive and intensive interventions (prevent, reduce, delay).

### Learning from elsewhere

One of the issues identified during government intervention was that the council wasn't learning enough from other councils. We've worked hard to change this by building a more open and learning-focused culture.

A key example is inviting the Local Government Association to carry out a Peer Review of our Housing Services. Alongside an external review of our Housing Revenue Account business plan and our Consumer Standards self-assessment, this has helped us develop a clear action plan to improve services for our tenants. 72.5% of our tenants were very satisfied or fairly satisfied with overall service of our Housing teams (up from 69.2% in 2024/25).

Following an intensive assessment process during May 2025, Care Quality Commission formally recognised, through evidence, that our Adult Social Care teams are delivering Good services. The comprehensive assessment involved a period of on-site interviews with our ASC staff, Members and Senior Leaders, meetings with some of our health and care partners, an in-depth review of a wide range of data, and direct conversations with some of the people who receive our care.

## D. DETERMINING THE INTERVENTIONS NECESSARY TO OPTIMISE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF OUTCOMES

In the report, CQC highlighted several strengths not just in how day-to-day care is provided, but also with forward planning and our innovative approach to working with partners outside the traditional social care remit to put every person in the centre of a holistic conversation about their care. The report focused in on other areas of strength, including:

- CQC heard that people receiving care in Thurrock feel they have easy access to integrated health and social care support within their communities.
- Partnership working goes beyond care providers, and our integration with partners in health, private and voluntary sectors is an area of real celebration and strength.
- Commissioning practices are centred on outcomes rather than rigid structures, meaning services are tailored to the unique needs of every individual.
- Rapid interventions are delivered particularly well, supporting individuals in crisis and reducing unnecessary hospital admissions.
- Carers in Thurrock feel supported and aware of resources available to them, with survey rates showing their satisfaction levels are higher than the UK average.
- Safeguarding practices are well-established, with strong internal governance and oversight approaches in place.
- There is a visible internal culture of continuous learning and innovation.

The report has been reviewed in detail and learning is informing a forward plan of work to deliver continued innovative thinking and practice over the coming year.

### **Housing Regulator / Improvements**

During 2025/26, the council undertook a programme of review, assurance and improvement activity to better understand its position as a social housing landlord and its compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's consumer standards. This included a consumer standards self-assessment, the LGA Social Housing Peer Review, Pennington Choices compliance and assurance review work, the Campbell Tickell HRA Business Plan review, and wider safety, quality and compliance assurance activity. This work helped identify gaps, risks, dependencies and improvement priorities across governance, resident safety, asset management, compliance, tenant voice, performance, HRA sustainability and long-term investment planning.

The findings from this work informed the development of the Integrated Housing Improvement Programme and Integrated Housing Improvement Action Plan, which brought improvement activity into a more coordinated cross-council framework for delivery, oversight and assurance. Alongside

## D. DETERMINING THE INTERVENTIONS NECESSARY TO OPTIMISE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF OUTCOMES

the implementation of improvement activity, the council also began engagement with the Regulator of Social Housing, including through self-referral, to ensure that the regulator was sighted on the council's position, the areas requiring improvement, and the action being taken in response. This reflected a more transparent and proactive approach to managing regulatory risk and strengthening the council's control environment for landlord services.

Programme governance was strengthened through clearer workstream ownership, regular highlight reporting, risk and issue management, evidence tracking and escalation through senior officer governance. The council also developed a more structured approach to regulatory readiness, including the creation of an evidence library, refreshed performance indicators, compliance scorecards, a refreshed housing risk register and establishing an approach for interim external challenge through the Critical Friends Panel.

While further work remains ongoing, activity during 2025/26 helped move the council from identifying regulatory and assurance gaps towards a more coordinated programme of delivery, oversight and evidence-building against the consumer standards.

### **Arrangements for the achievement of social value in commissioning, procurement and contracting**

Social value considerations are embedded throughout the procurement and contracting lifecycle, ensuring that economic, social, and environmental outcomes are integrated into the process. Defined social value themes i.e. economic, social, and environmental are incorporated within tender documentation, providing clarity on the Council's priorities and expectations. Social value is included as a weighted evaluation criterion within procurement processes, enabling suppliers to demonstrate how their proposals will deliver measurable benefits to the local community.

Contractual arrangements, including clearly defined key performance indicators (KPIs), formalise the social value commitments contained within the successful supplier's proposal, ensuring that delivery expectations are explicit, enforceable, and can be actively monitored through contract management process. A social value dashboard is being developed to capture and report on commitments and delivery across contracts, strengthening oversight, transparency, and the ability to evidence impact. A partnership-based approach to contract management supports continuous improvement, enabling the Council and its suppliers to adapt, innovate, and maximise social value outcomes over the life of the contract.

## E. DEVELOPING THE ENTITY'S CAPACITY, INCLUDING THE CAPABILITY OF ITS LEADERSHIP AND THE INDIVIDUALS WITHIN IT

### Development of our Members and Senior Leaders

Targeted development activity was delivered to support Cabinet Members in 2025/26, including in identified areas of need such as media training and housing-specific training to support engagement with the Housing Regulator. Mentoring and additional training concluded in February has strengthened individual and collective Cabinet capability whilst supporting the effective discharge of portfolio responsibilities. This has supported the council to demonstrate robust internal oversight, political and senior leadership, decision making and governance frameworks.

The Leadership Network has supported the development of the draft Leadership Charter, whilst providing an opportunity to test its content with a cross-section of management tiers from across the Council. The feedback gathered ensures the Charter will accurately reflect the behaviours and expectations required of effective leadership.

The Senior Leadership Network have met periodically over the year both in person and online, to explore leadership theory in practice and work through practical operational issues. The Network has reported a greater sense of collaboration on cross-departmental and corporate issues as well as building more effective working relationships helping to build a more collaborative culture.

### How we are meeting capacity challenges

To better support workforce planning, we have looked to reduce reliance on agency workers. This has included successfully converting from agency to permanent roles. Examples include a targeted recruitment campaign within Finance teams, resulting in up to 15 offers being made, with candidates currently onboarding. This is expected to reduce agency usage within the Finance directorate.

To ensure we do not lose sight of this priority area we are monitoring activity in the Corporate Performance reports. As a result, we can scrutinise quarterly activity and know that between January and March included 99 new agency approved requests via 4me. The requirements were primarily linked to harder-to-fill roles, including Planning, Social Care, Waste and specialist technical Licensing positions, where agency cover was required while recruitment activity was ongoing. Recruitment to these roles is now largely complete. There were also requests for contract and procurement roles and three heads of service. However, posts supporting LGR activity will continue to be recruited on an agency basis, as this remains the most appropriate and flexible approach to secure the capacity and specialist capability required to deliver this work.

For service areas where there are more complex issues, we are exploring new approaches. In 2025/26 we have continued to embed a “grow your own” approach to recruitment and retention through Social Workers Academy, meeting a specific need for social care capacity and capability, - We are retaining a skilled and steadily expanding workforce from the strong uptake. Newly Qualified Social Workers complete their Assessed and

## E. DEVELOPING THE ENTITY'S CAPACITY, INCLUDING THE CAPABILITY OF ITS LEADERSHIP AND THE INDIVIDUALS WITHIN IT

Supported Year in Employment, and those who show commitment to staying in Thurrock and consistently meet our standards are offered permanent roles. We have also approached "Frontline", who run a national training programme, to explore avenues to work alongside them in creating more opportunities for colleagues to start their social work career in Thurrock. This approach is supporting a capable, valued and motivated staff with a robust performance management framework.

### **Developing our staff and supporting health and wellbeing**

All new members of staff are required to attend a Corporate Induction and complete a suite of mandatory training which will support them in their role and understanding of the council's key policies and procedures. Examples include adherence to data protection and the public sector equality duty.

During 2025/26, 77 staff members started an apprenticeship. During the year £481k was added to the levy funds (which includes a 10% top up from the government) and £707k was spent. No funds expired 2025/26.

Workforce planning and transformation is provided by through an HR business partners process, this approach provides a more strategic, integrated, and business-focused way of managing people.

The number of days lost to sickness is monitored in the corporate performance report. Whilst sickness is in line with benchmark comparators, the number of sickness days per FTE has increased throughout the year and in comparison, to last year. As a result, work has been undertaken to actively monitor, support and deliver targeted upskilling for managers. High impact long term cases are being actively supported and monitored with good levels of engagement with Occupational Health. The managing sickness policy and enabling support tools are currently being developed to support managers and employees and will ensure a consistent approach is taken across the organisation.

Staff are able to access confidential support through the Employee Assistance Programme (EPA) and obtain professional support that helps employees deal with personal or work-related problems before those issues negatively affect their wellbeing or job performance.

As a corporate body and employer, we recognise and accept our responsibility to provide a healthy and safe working environment for employees and non-employees, who may be affected by our work activities. How we will fulfil our statutory duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and associated health and safety legislation are articulated in the Corporate Health and Safety Policy which was updated in January 2026. Through this policy, the Council encourages a positive health and safety culture, actively supported by its Executive Directors, Assistant Directors/Heads of Service and Managers, and involves employees in the decision-making processes either on an individual basis or through recognised trade union safety representatives.

## E. DEVELOPING THE ENTITY'S CAPACITY, INCLUDING THE CAPABILITY OF ITS LEADERSHIP AND THE INDIVIDUALS WITHIN IT

During 2025/26, the Council has explored how emerging technologies can support specific teams and their requirements, as a result a small number of staff within Children's services were trained in the use of MS co-pilot which they are now using to drive efficiencies within the SEND team. A number of the Adults team have been trained and have been using AI driven facilitation software so that they are able to automate the production of meeting minutes. The publication of an AI Policy to support all staff, and use of Microsoft Co-Pilot rollout strategy is planned for 2026/27.

### **Schemes of delegation**

Roles and responsibilities for decision making for officers and members are set out in the constitution and in terms of executive and non-executive functions, key decisions and where decisions should be taken this is clear. The Contract Procedure Rules were updated following the implementation of the Procurement Act 2023. However, it is recognised that the Scheme of Delegation to Officers is significantly out of date and requires a complete refresh to align with organisational structure and to provide clarity on scope of decision making. Work is underway, but has been delayed as a result of elections. This is being picked up as a priority action for 2026/27 as part of the outstanding constitution review work.

### **Financial Management**

Roles within the Finance Department are aligned in accordance with the principles set out in the CIPFA Financial Management Code (FM Code) and the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2015). Specifically the structure is set up to develop and implement strategy and to resource and deliver the authority's strategic objectives and is able to influence all material business decisions.

In order to develop the Council's capacity in financial management it is important that there is sufficient capability and capacity within the finance team. Following a period of permanent recruitment in 2024/25, 2025/26 was a transition year with new appointments bedding into their roles, supplemented with experienced officers in key hard to recruit roles. Progress has been made during 2025/26; commissioners identified the enhanced financial leadership capacity and that much good work had been done to address historic financial accounts and governance issues. However, there are still a number of open posts across finance in specific areas that have proven difficult to fill, and inevitably this could hamper further progress.

Nevertheless advances have been made; The integration of new finance staff will include embedding standards and behaviours across the service; and budget holders are supported in financial management and training courses were run for budget holders in 2025/26 and will be continued in to 2026/27.

## E. DEVELOPING THE ENTITY'S CAPACITY, INCLUDING THE CAPABILITY OF ITS LEADERSHIP AND THE INDIVIDUALS WITHIN IT

It is important that there are continued and sustained improvements in the finance team so that the service is able to lead on the promotion and delivery by the whole authority, of good financial management so that public money is safeguarded at all times and used appropriately, economically, efficiently and effectively.

Financial Control procedures are now well embedded within the Council and are regularly reported to senior management and the Audit Committee.

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### Risk Management

During in 2025/26 risk management was an improvement focus area linked to the intervention recovery and the delivery of our Corporate and Improvement Plan. The aim of this work was to provide the infrastructure and environment required to improve risk culture and to ensure that the Council proactively follows this Strategy to embed strong risk management practice across all business activity. As a result, the Risk Management team developed and implemented a Risk Management Framework across the organisation, including:

- A full review and update of the Corporate Risk Register.
- A review and update of Directorate-level Risk Registers.
- The development of updated Risk Management guidance documentation.

In addition, new risk management software has been rolled out to support monitoring and tracking. Risk Champions have been identified and recruited across all Council services to support the embedding of risk management practices. As a result, services have begun to regularly monitor and update risks as part of the quarterly reporting cycle, however more work is needed to ensure risks are consistently managed and owned across the organisation. Risk Management training has been delivered across all Directorates outlining a consistent approach to be taken across all elements of the framework. Practice will require ongoing monitoring to understand the effectiveness of this training.

The Corporate Risk Register is currently reviewed by SLT and the Audit Committee every quarter. It has now been linked to Directorate and Service level risk registers. Further iterative updates of the registers occur every quarter which ensures increased alignment between all registers. This work is directly supporting the Council to gain robust internal oversight, political and senior leadership, decision making and governance frameworks. The Council now has a consistent and aligned risk profile across the organisation, with at least 70% of corporate, directorate, and service-level risks mapped and connected. This is ensuring clearer visibility of shared risks, and improved decision-making, and more coherent risk management across all levels.

The SLT ensures that escalation processes are in place for designated parts of the Council for risk reviews and ensures participation in the delivery of risk management within the organisation. Individual corporate risks are assigned to each member of SLT (as delegated by the Chief Executive), and they come together to approve corporate risks as escalated from directorate management teams. SLT have overall accountability for risk management across the Council including ensuring the corporate risk register is a live and up to date record of the current risk exposure that is reviewed every Quarter.

## F. MANAGING RISKS AND PERFORMANCE THROUGH ROBUST INTERNAL CONTROL AND STRONG PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Cabinet and Committee decision-making reports now also are required to include a section outlining the associated risk implications, ensuring that risk considerations are fully integrated into the Council's governance and decision-making processes.

Although much has been done to improve awareness and consistency, the new approach is still developing and will need continued support to ensure compliance and embed risk management into the Council's wider governance culture.

### **CIPFA Financial Management Code**

The council has completed a first draft of a CIPFA Financial Management Code Self-Assessment action plan which is feeding in to the finance improvement plan sufficiently implement it. A further assessment will be completed in July following the statement of accounts being produced at the end of June to better ascertain how the council has performed. This will align with the Finance Improvement Plan to strengthen internal controls and governance. The personal objectives of senior officers of the finance team will be aligned to the principles of the CIPFA FM code and will focus on standards, behaviours and continuous improvement

### **Head of Internal Audit Opinion**

The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) require the Chief Audit Executive (Head of Internal Audit) to provide an annual opinion, based upon and limited to the work performed, on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's framework of governance, risk management and control (i.e. the organisation's system of internal control).

This is achieved through a risk-based plan of work, agreed with management (Senior Leadership Team) and approved by the Audit Committee, designed to provide a reasonable level of assurance. The opinion does not imply that Internal Audit has reviewed all risks relating to the organisation. Internal Audit work was performed in conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The Internal Audit Plan 2025/26 was based on 500 audit days, this was a significant increase from the previous year.

The Head of Internal Audit, Counter Fraud, Risk and Insurance is the Council's Chief Audit Executive's (CAE). The CAE's overall opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's framework of governance, risk management and control based on the annual review of governance and the assurance work of Internal Audit throughout 2025/26 is **LIMITED ASSURANCE**

### **GDPR and Cyber-security**

## F. MANAGING RISKS AND PERFORMANCE THROUGH ROBUST INTERNAL CONTROL AND STRONG PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The Council's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) training is mandatory for every new starter and councillor and then annually thereafter, including councillors. After a series of reminders, non-compliance results in disabled access to IT until training is completed.

Cyber security – the Council has strengthened its cyber capability in 2025/26 through the implementation of MS Defender. It provides real-time antivirus, anti-phishing, firewall, and device management capabilities across Windows. The Council has also run a series of phishing campaigns throughout the year and have used this to identify additional training needs for officers. Funding has also been secured to implement a Security Operations Centre and a Security Information and Event Management solution that will be delivered in 2026/27 which will further enhance our cyber security capability

### **Audit on records management and records activity**

A review of Records Management was undertaken in September 2025 to consider the controls in place to ensure compliance with GDPR regulations and the council's own retention policies. The review raised some concerns regarding the storage and retention of documents and the volumes involved. There is a migration project for transferring data to Sharepoint but this is behind schedule and may need additional resources particularly due to the volumes and lack of clarity with some of the boxes and documents retained.

### **Counter Fraud**

During 2025/26 the Counter Fraud & Investigation team has delivered its Counter Fraud Annual Action Plan proactively targeting the risks and threats faced through data analytics and proactive operation, including reducing the threats faced in the council's housing stock. The Counter Fraud team records its activity regularly for the submission to the Council's Audit Committee on its performance throughout the year. The outcomes achieved by the teams this year include:

- 52 social housing properties were recovered
- 27 Fraud 'training and insight' sessions delivered to over 120 staff members & contractors
- The compulsory staff 'e-learning' fraud awareness program was launched
- 277 new suspected fraud referrals received & investigated

## H. IMPLEMENTING GOOD PRACTICES IN TRANSPARENCY, REPORTING, AND AUDIT TO DELIVER EFFECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

### **Implementing good practice in transparency**

The Commissioner 6<sup>th</sup> Report was published in March 2026 and took a view on the progress the Council has made alongside areas for continued focus. This report demonstrates a continued positive trajectory for improvement and supports our planning to monitor, track and challenge internally as well as through published methods as described in sections C and D through the Corporate and Improvement Plan and associated quarterly performance reporting.

Ongoing publication of the council's corporate performance data provides further opportunity for SLT, Cabinet and all members to interrogate the quality of this data. This work has continued to improve over the past year with more transparency on the initiatives and activity being taken to impact performance. During the summer of 2025, an Annual Report for 2024/25 was published for the first time in several years. This provided an opportunity to report the breadth of activity undertaken across the council, describe how public funds were being spent and ensure our teams and officers are accountable for the commitments made in the Corporate Plan.

Other example of good practice in transparency are outlines in section C and D above.

### **Implementing good practices in reporting**

Consideration and development of the AGS has improved over time, from a place where it did not properly reflect the reality of the organisation and was not produced or published in a timely manner to a place where each directorate is inputting into the assessment with an update on the Action Plan reported to Audit Committee mid-year. The AGS is also aligned with external auditor recommendations and used by officers leading on improvement work to ensure it is seen as a key part of the cycle of continuous improvement.

Further information about how we report on improvement and performance is described in section C and D above.

### **Assurance and effective accountability**

The Performance Management and Assurance Framework was under review in 2025/26, and an updated version will be published in summer 2026. The review has seen teams from across the council come together to strengthen its assurance framework. As a result, performance, risk, audit and finance teams will triangulate data to support the monitoring of risk, performance and development of the audit plan.

The Internal Audit function continue to experience capacity constraints throughout some of the year however made good progress in several areas of work. This includes the work to progress the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme for Internal Audit. Areas of weakness have been improved and will continue to as the team are trained to align to new standards. Gaps were also identified in compliance with the Public Sector

## H. IMPLEMENTING GOOD PRACTICES IN TRANSPARENCY, REPORTING, AND AUDIT TO DELIVER EFFECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

Internal Audit Standards (PAIAS). However, this still results in less than the target of achieving 75% compliance for 2025/26. As a result, an action plan is being produced to address remaining gaps and will be presented to both SLT and the Audit Committee in Q2 of 2026/27

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## 2025/26 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT ACTION PLAN

Title	Action	Note	New or existing
Contract Management	Major projects and all contracts to be procured and contract managed in-line with relevant laws and regulations to secure value for money and quality services	Has been referenced as ongoing in last two AGS and significant activity reported as outlined in report to Audit Committee March 2026. Now absorbed as part of the Strategic Commissioning workstream, detail on which is set out in this AGS.	Existing – from 2023/24 AGS
Local Plan	Publish Local Plan for consultation to then proceed with approval and decision making processes with a target adoption date of January – March 2028.	This was reported in the last two AGS as delayed. As reported to Audit Committee in March 2026 significant progress has been made. The draft Local Plan for consultation is scheduled to go to Cabinet in July 2026.	Existing – from 2023/24 AGS
Implementation of the CIPFA Financial Management Code	Update processes and procedures to align with the Code.	The completed draft will feed into the Finance Improvement plan along with action following the outturn to ensure that we are compliant.	Existing – from 2023/24 AGS
Develop an action relating to Finance Improvement	The scope of the Finance Improvement Plan will be updated with learnings from the outturn and Statement of Accounts processes. The plan will be completed and taken to SLT and Finance Recovery Board for endorsement.	We have identified the areas of financial improvement which the plan will cover.	New

Constitution review	<p>Take Cabinet and Council Procedure Rules and Ethical Framework Protocols to Council for approval</p> <p>Complete review of Scheme of Delegation and any remaining provisions and follow appropriate governance route</p>	Revised timetable to be agreed with new administration	Existing – from 2024/25 AGS
Local Code of Corporate Governance	Review and update as necessary Local Code of Corporate Governance	The Code was introduced and adopted in October 2024, and so is due a review	New
Forward planning of delegated key decisions	Embed process of delegated key decisions being added to the forward plan at least 28 days in advance of the decision being taken.	This has been identified as an area of weakness. Training and engagement to be undertaken. Should lead to a reduction in the use of urgency notices.	New
Thurrock Regeneration Limited	Understand options, including possible winding up of the company, develop action plan and start delivery.	There is limited knowledge within the organisation regarding the status of the subsidiary company. External advisors have been appointed to assist with the options appraisal.	New
Improved compliance with FOI and SAR responses within statutory deadlines.	Continue engagement via SLT about whole council response to requests for information. Introduce technology to assist with time intensive issues such as redaction.	Work is already underway with a report having been taken to SLT in March 2026 and procurement process of software tool started.	New

Reliance on agency staff	This is already tracked and reported on through the PMAF, but work to be developed on looking on options in this space.	Work has already started to consider this challenge in People Services. For transformation and LGR support work it may be appropriate to engage agency staff on work that will be transitional/ short term.	New
Embedding risk into culture of organisation	Action plan to be developed	Significant work has been undertaken to introduce JCAD as risk reporting function and on risk reporting in reports to members. Work now to be undertaken to develop and embed risk registers across the organisation.	New
Records Management	Physical archives and SharePoint migration project already underway, to be continued across the year.		New
Internal Audit function	Year 2 of the 3 year audit plan will be implemented and kept under review by the Audit Committee	A 3-year Audit Plan was adopted by the committee. 2025/26 was the first year of the three-year plan. The plan for the year was completed in full and reported to the committee.	New